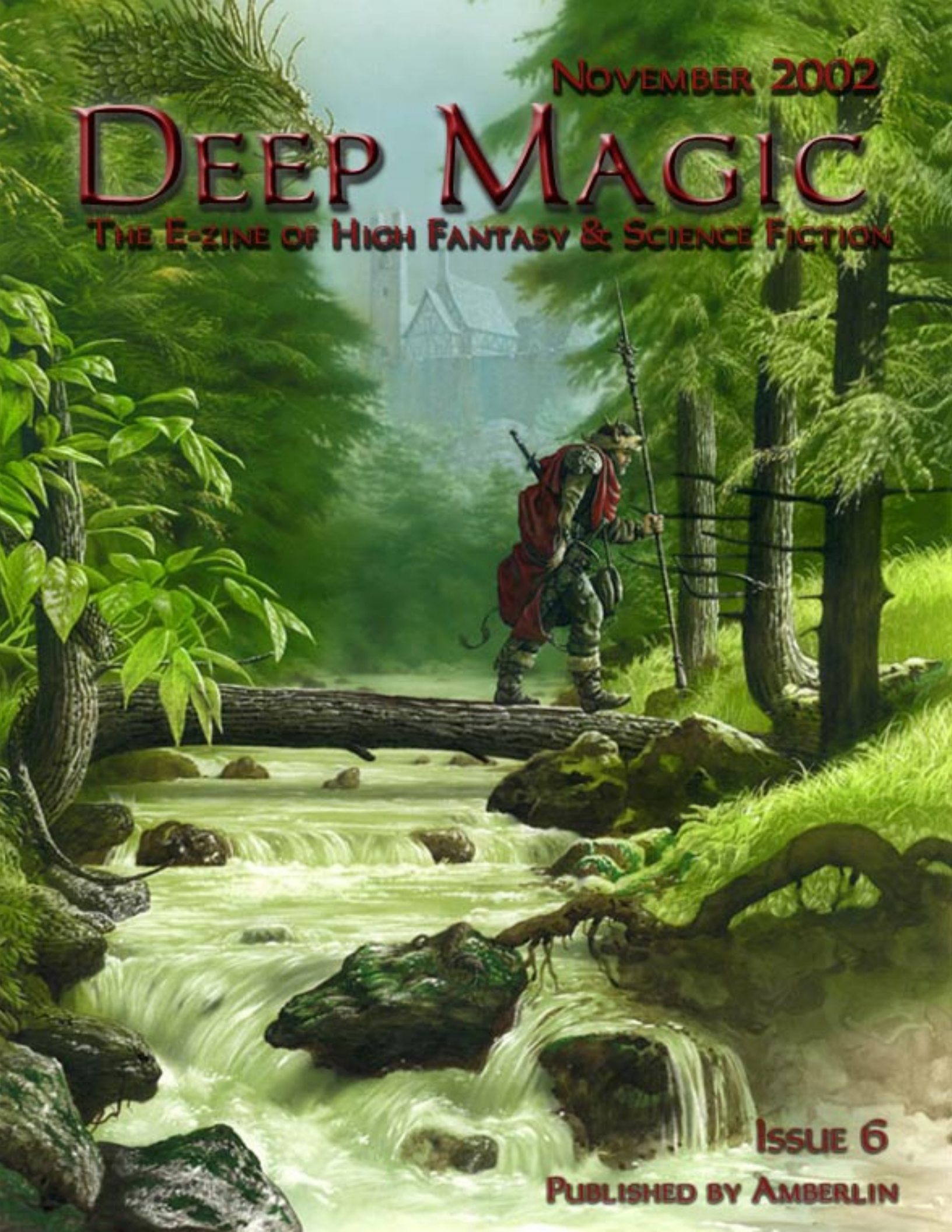
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Note From the Editors

November 2002

So here we are, already at Issue 6. Now honestly, how many of you didn't think we would make it this far? Most e-zines sputter out after just a few issues. It is a lot of work to do on a monthly basis with a volunteer staff and no revenues, but this isn't about money for us. Of course, we wouldnt turn away any donations or free software, bandwidth, or equipment, but our goal is to keep this e-zine running without charging for subscriptions. We are in this for the long haul, and we hope you continue to join us each month. The only thing that would end Deep Magic would be if we stopped receiving stories and artwork submissions. We currently have enough to fill our next few issues, but we always need more. If you're an aspiring author but are a little shy, don't be. If your first submission isn't accepted, don't give up. Writing is a process of rejections, frustrations, and successes. So keep the submissions coming and tell your friends to submit their stories as well.

We're excited about this month's issue. With *Procyx* on hiatus after book 1, *Landmoor* is left as the lone novel this issue. This is the last installment of this fantasy novel, but not the last you will see of it, we hope. Be sure to take part in the *Landmoor* survey. We intend to bring *Landmoor* to you in its entirety in paperback format. And if interest remains high, author Jeff Wheeler has promised to bring Book 2 straight to paperback.

In addition to *Landmoor*, we have three more short stories. *The Onus* and *Bliss* couldn't be more different on the fantasy end, and *Kylaann Zn* promises to be a unique sci-fi entry. We think you'll enjoy all three. And, as usual, we have a new writing challenge, an excellent way to hone your writing skills.

We're doing something different with our poll this month. Since you have already picked the top fantasy movie of the 20th century (*Willow*), as well as the top superhero movie of all-time (*Spider-Man*), we thought it time to pick the top Science Fiction movie ever made. Not an easy task. So over the next few months, we will hold a tournament of voting, narrowing down the list with each issue. Be sure to participate.

We thank all of you for your support. Each issue of Deep Magic has been more successful than the last, and our subscriber base has risen steadily. As always, we invite you to leave a note for us, our authors, or our artists on the Message Boards. Let them know what you think. And enjoy Issue 6!

The Editors
Deep Magic

Safe Places for Minds to Wander

Letters to the Editors

As with any publication, we at Deep Magic receive notes from our readers from time to time. Some of them are so nice that we couldn't resist printing them. If you ever have a comment, good or bad, about Deep Magic, please send us an email or drop by the Message Boards. We'd love to hear from you!

To the editors,

I congratulate you and the other editors on a fine job. Deep Magic has class that I so often find missing in many Fantasy domains. The elegant presentation and quality content make your e-journal a professional and appealing read. I always cringe when I find yet another cliché-filled fantasy novel, or a trashy/tacky/gaudy paperback cover. I find I frequently judge a book by its cover in the initial moments of contact, but when it comes to the crunch, the black print inside is what really matters. Your e-journal is far above the amateur work found on the Internet.

Warmest Regards,
Annick

Reply: You know, we really do enjoy getting email like this. Thank you, Annick, for the kind words.

Dear Jeff Wheeler:

Many thanks for your fine letter. I feel highly complimented by the invitation to write an article for Deep Magic.

Ordinarily, I'd be delighted to offer an essay. But I'm now so entangled in a new project that I don't dare take on anything else.

Even so, be sure that you and your readers have all my warmest greetings.

With great appreciation,

Lloyd Alexander

Reply: It was worth a shot! We appreciate Mr. Alexander's response and, frankly, we're happy he's busy on a new project and not spending his time writing an article for us! :)

I very much appreciate the chance this e-zine gives me to read new things without worrying about stuff I might run into.
THANKS!

Brenna Joy

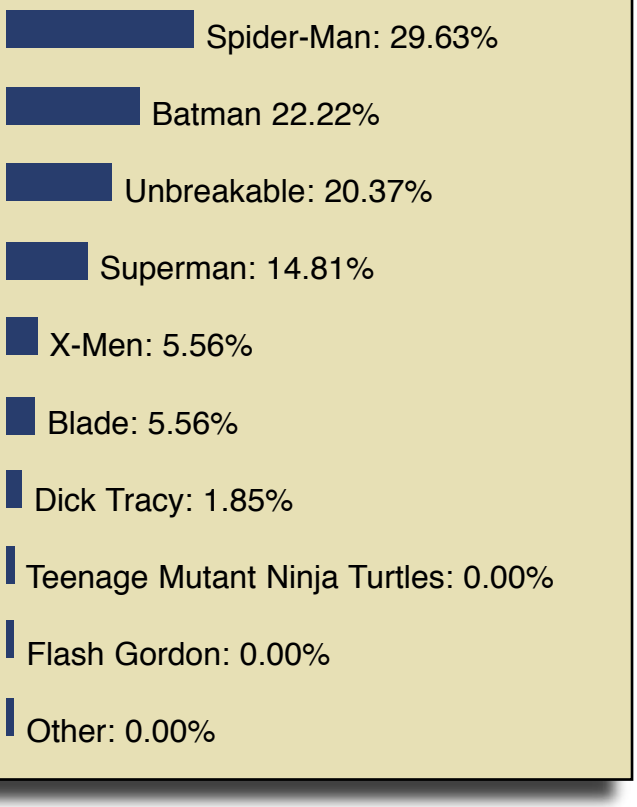
Reply: Then we've done exactly what we set out to do! Thanks for the note.

Poll: The Best SciFi Movie of All Time

How do you begin to choose the best Sci-Fi movie ever made? There are countless options out there, and many of them are quite good. We at Deep Magic decided to try something new with our poll. Rather than decide the best SciFi movie in one simple poll, we're going to hold a tournament over the course of several months. For those familiar with the NCAA college basketball tournament, it will run simliar to that. For the first month, you will choose the best movie in each of 32 brackets, with each bracket containing three movies. The next month, we will be down to 32 movies, split into 16 brackets (we may change this next month and choose to go with 8 brackets of 4 movies each). The month after will be the Quarterfinals, and so on. We think this will be the best way to narrow the field down to the best SciFi movie ever made. Now, we think we came up with a pretty exhaustive list of quality movies, but if we missed one you think really needs to be on there, let us know. If we agree, we'll slip it into one of the 16 brackets next month. There may also be a movie on the list that you don't think qualifies as Sci-Fi, despite being an excellent movie. If that's the case, don't vote for it just because you like it better. So, without further ado, click the text to the bottom right and vote in the opening round of the Sci-Fi Tournament.

Results from the October 2002 Poll

What is the best comic book superhero movie of all time?
(results as of October 23, 2002)



One final note: You will notice that we didn't list sequels (e.g. Star Wars, Star Trek, Alien, Terminator, etc.). In such cases, simply consider your favorite among that series. If you think the original Star Wars trilogy was fantastic, but you hate the last two, then just consider the originals and pick accordingly.

Go to the SciFi Tournament Poll

Our poll sponsored by csPoller. They provided us a great poll script, so please go to their site and check out their great scripts. They offer a wide selection of quality cgi-scripts, and their support is fantastic.

Writing Challenge

Our October writing challenge is over. We received some great submissions. Not all of them were selected for print, but we thank everyone who participated. If you sent one that wasn't printed, don't give up! Keep trying. Below you will find a list of the top choices, decided upon by our panel of editors. Click the titles to jump to the story. We hope you enjoy them. As for next month, we want more submissions. Send your writing challenge submission to writingchallenge@amberlin.com. Submissions are due by the 20th of the month. We will post the top selections next month. In the meantime, here are the October 2002 writing challenge top selections:

The Okonto by Anne M. Stickel

November 2002 Challenge

The devil is in the details, as the saying goes, but it is also the little touches that bring a fantasy world or science fiction universe to life. The writing challenge this month is to create a scene where you pay attention to the little details. It can be a busy marketplace or spaceport, a wooded forest, or even an entryway. Use specific details to describe the scene without relying on writing crutches like: "stacks of fresh produce lined the streets" (What kind of produce? Pumpkins, green bananas?) or "huge towering trees blocked the view further ahead" (What kind of trees? What other specific vegatation exists in that ecosystem) or "big ugly aliens loitered in the intergalactic restroom." (Well, maybe specific details are not desirable in this case, but more description is.) And the trick, of course, will be adding enough specific details to make it interesting and not so much that it becomes a Tolkienesque epic for your character to get from one side of the room to the other. Pay attention to the point of view you decide to use. A ranger or omniscient narrator might know the plant as poison oak, but an inept city-boy would only be able to describe it. Use the internet for ideas of plants, flowers, trees, or upholstry. And, as always, keep the submission less than 1000 words. Dazzle us with your subtlety.

October 2002 Writing Challenge: This challenge should be a fun one. One popular aspect of Fantasy involves some type of mystical, fabled item of wonderous power. Maybe it's the "one ring to rule them all" or the sword set in a stone, waiting for the true king to draw it forth. Not only do these items have awesome power, but their histories are shrouded in myth and legend. For the challenge, your task is to create your own item of mystic power. Give it a past, a legend, and a purpose. Be creative, but keep it under 1,000 words.

The Okonto
By Anne M. Stickel

My grandfather, Takanna, shook his red-and-black painted rattle, drawing all eyes to him around our campfire, and spoke. "A man of the People found the okonto long ago, resting in a dry riverbed outside of our Lands. Dropped there by the Night, as She fled the Day's improper advances, it is made of a hard metal unknown to us, taking the size, shape and color of a blue thistle. Tonight I pass it to my grandson, who is about to leave us to journey across the stars into manhood and receive his name. May he return it safely to us when his journey is done."

"Ee-yah-hey!" shouted the gathered circle of men. They squatted, swaying their woven grass kilts from which beads dangled and clashed. Their glances cut me like sharp knives. Suddenly, each man rose as one to stamp his right foot toward the fire. They took the okonto from Grandfather and passed it from hand to hand. At last, warmed by their hands, it came to me. I could feel how their lives as men nourished the okonto. The blue thistle, watered by their sweat, sent the roots of their dreams into my flesh and fed me their fears and joys, so that my sacred journey would be safe.

Stepping backwards into the darkness, I raised the okonto over my head with my right hand, shouting, "WE ARE OF ONE MIND, ONE HEART, ONE WILL, ONE SPIRIT!"

"Hey-dah-ho!" The men acknowledged my salute in one voice, each stamping his left foot in unison, as he brought it toward the fire. Sparks rose from the fire, blending with the bright stars above. Chief Takanna beat the small ceremonial drum, while the others paced around the fire, which sent up strange scents from the herbs they tossed into the flames. Thunder answered the drums. The stars were calling.

The drink given me by the women before the ceremony dulled my pain when I drew the okonto's sharp metal thorns across my left breast in the symbol of travel. No sooner had I done so, than the lightning flashed in the cloudless sky. Not one drop of rain fell to dilute my blood: a good sign. I turned from the fire and walked naked into the cold night. My old life of nameless youth oozed from my wounds. The night-scavenging degili, scenting my flesh and blood, came for me. The okonto's power, greater even than that of fire, protected me. I heard degili snuffling and whining as they nosed the dust for my blood with scrabbling claws and slavering jaws. The foul, black-furred horrors dared not approach, though their red eyes watched from the darkness.

Stars and lightning guided my steps to a dry streambed some distance from our camp. Except for the magic potion, I'd touched neither food nor drink for three days. I clutched the okonto to my throbbing, sticky chest, planted my feet in the dust, and threw back my head, opening my mouth to the Night. Closing my eyes, I became one with the okonto, so that She would pick me up and take me to Herself.

Bliss: A Fairy Tale
By Steven Richards

Once upon a time, there was a kingdom. It was a peaceful kingdom, full of the happy sorts of people you never wish to meet at a party. In this kingdom there lived…uh…stood, a castle of prodigious size and beauty. A very pretty castle, with only the smallest of problems. Missing a wall here, missing a tower there. Oh yes, and no king. No royal family for that matter. Just a band of brave, cheerful knights in gleaming armor. Of course, the kingdom was far too peaceful to need any kind of army, so…"

"Oh dear," said Grandmother, who had been listening while doing her sewing. The children looked up at her, puzzled, and Mother threw up her hands in exasperation.

"What is it this time, mum?"

"Just the way you started it, my dear," Grandmother replied, not looking up from her sewing. She was making a new pair of leggings for the smallest child, a boy of four years. "'Once upon a time' and all that silliness. Too much like one of those bubbly fairy tales. No room for those any more… dark times these are…"

"But *back then*, they weren't dark times!" Mother protested. "It was happy and peaceful. Ohh *all right*. Can I go on now?"

"Oh, of course, dear. I didn't mean to interrupt, I was simply pointing out…"

"Thank you," Mother interrupted. "As I was saying, children…"

"Just the way you started it, my dear," Grandmother replied . . . "'Once upon a time' and all that silliness. Too much like one of those bubbly fairy tales."

Back in the old days, there was this peaceful kingdom of happy people and cheerful knights in gleaming armor. The kingdom was far too peaceful for an army, so the knights spent most of their time doing what we refer to as 'stupid guy things'. They would drink too much, ride too fast, and fence with one another in the most unlikely places and at the most inconvenient times.

"Back in those days, the only member of the royal family was a princess who lived in one of the castle's three towers. It was a square castle, as all proper castles are, and thus it should have had four towers. But it only had three. The corner where the fourth would have been was taken up by a particularly infuriating bramble bush that refused all efforts to dispatch it. The knights were always stationed at the castle, when they weren't off terrorizing the countryside with their fencing and singing matches. They were to defend the princess. There was nothing to defend her from, of course, but they took their task very seriously…when they weren't, you know…out and about.

"There was only one knight who didn't drink too much. He did ride too fast, of course. That's something all knights are fond of. He was the fastest of the knights, and had the fastest horse, the sharpest sword, and… the least armor. He didn't like armor. He complained that it made him sweat too much, made it too difficult to get on and off of his horse. 'How'm I supposed to rescue ye from the dragon, m'lady,' he would say, 'if I can't even git down from me bloody horse?' It was nonsense of course. They had no dragon. Well, they had a lizard in the kitchens… the Cook claimed it was a dragon, but no one believed him, nor his threats of imminent violence if it was not allowed free

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On Writing
By Robert J. Sawyer
Heinlein's Rule

There are countless rules for writing success, but the most famous ones, at least in the speculative-fiction field, are the five coined by the late, great Robert A. Heinlein.

Heinlein used to say he had no qualms about giving away these rules, even though they explained how you could become his direct competitor, because he knew that almost no one would follow their advice.

In my experience, that's true: if you start off with a hundred people who say they want to be writers, you lose half of the remaining total after each rule — fully half the people who hear each rule will fail to follow it.

I'm going to share Heinlein's five rules with you, plus add a sixth of my own.

Rule One: You Must Write

It sounds ridiculously obvious, doesn't it? But it is a very difficult rule to apply. You can't just talk about wanting to be a writer. You can't simply take courses, or read up on the process of writing, or daydream about someday getting around to it. The only way to become a writer is to plant yourself in front of your keyboard and go to work.

And don't you dare complain that you don't have the time to write. Real writers buy the time, if they can't get it any other way. Take Toronto's Terence M. Green, a high-school English teacher. His third novel, Shadow of Ashland, just came out from Tor. Terry takes every fifth year off from teaching without pay so that he can write; most writers I know have made similar sacrifices for their art.

(Out of our hundred original aspirant writers, half will never get around to writing anything. That leaves us with fifty...)

Rule Two: Finish What Your Start

You cannot learn how to write without seeing a piece through to its conclusion. Yes, the first few pages you churn out might be weak, and you may be tempted to toss them out. Don't. Press on until you're done. Once you have an overall draft, with a beginning, middle, and end, you'll be surprised at how easy it is to see what works and what doesn't. And you'll never master such things as plot, suspense, or character growth unless you actually construct an entire piece.

On a related point: if you belong to a writers' workshop, don't let people critique your novel a chapter at a time. No one can properly judge a book by a piece lifted out of it at random, and you'll end up with all sorts of pointless advice: "This part seems irrelevant." "Well, no, actually, it's very important a hundred pages from now . . ."

(Of our fifty remaining potential writers, half will never finish anything — leaving just twenty-five still in the running...)

Rule Three: You Must Refrain From Rewriting, Except to Editorial Order

This is the one that got Heinlein in trouble with creative-writing teachers. Perhaps a more appropriate wording would have been, "Don't tinker endlessly with your story." You can spend forever modifying, revising, and polishing. There's an old saying that stories are never finished, only abandoned — learn to abandon yours.

If you find your current revisions amount to restoring the work to the way it was at an earlier stage, then it's time to push the baby out of the nest.

And although many beginners don't believe it, Heinlein is right: if your story is close to publishable, editors will tell you what you have to do to make it salable. Some small-press magazines do this at length, but you'll also get advice from Analog, Asimov's, and The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction.

(Of our remaining twenty-five writers, twelve will fiddle endlessly, and so are now out of the game. Twelve more will finally declare a piece complete. The twenty-fifth writer, the one who got chopped in half, is now desperately looking for his legs...)

Rule Four: You Must Put Your Story on the Market

This is the hardest rule of all for beginners. You can't simply declare yourself to be a professional writer. Rather, it's a title that must be conferred upon you by those willing to pay money for your words. Until you actually show your work to an editor, you can live the fantasy that you're every bit as good as Guy Gavriel Kay or William Gibson. But having to see if that fantasy has any grounding in reality is a very hard thing for most people to do.

I know one Canadian aspirant writer who managed to delay for two years sending out his story because, he said, he didn't have any American stamps for the self-addressed stamped envelope. This, despite the fact that he'd known dozens of people who went regularly to the States and could have gotten stamps for him, despite the fact that he could have driven across the border himself and picked up stamps, despite the fact that you don't even really need US stamps — you can use International Postal Reply Coupons instead, available at any large post office. [And those in Toronto can buy actual U.S. stamps at the First Toronto Post Office at 260 Adelaide Street South.]

No, it wasn't stamps he was lacking — it was backbone. He was afraid to find out whether his prose was salable. Don't be a coward: send your story out.

(Of our twelve writers left, half of them won't work up the nerve to make a submission, leaving just six...)

Rule Five: You Must Keep it on the Market until it has Sold

It's a fact: work gets rejected all the time. Almost certainly your first submission will be rejected. Don't let that stop you. I've currently got 142 rejection slips in my files; every professional writer I know has stacks of them (the prolific Canadian horror writer Edo van Belkom does a great talk at SF conventions called "Thriving on Rejection" in which he reads samples from the many he's acquired over the years).

If the rejection note contains advice you think is good, revise the story and send it out again. If not, then simply turn the story around: pop it in the mail, sending it to another market. Keep at it. My own record for the maximum number of submissions before selling a story is eighteen — but the story did eventually find a good home. (And within days, I'd sold it again to a reprint-only

anthology; getting a story in print the first time opens up whole new markets.)

If your story is rejected, send it out that very same day to another market.

(Still, of our six remaining writers, three will be so discouraged by that first rejection that they'll give up writing for good. But three more will keep at it...)

Rule Six: Start Working on Something Else

That's my own rule. I've seen too many beginning writers labour for years over a single story or novel. As soon as you've finished one piece, start on another. Don't wait for the first story to come back from the editor you've submitted it to; get to work on your next project. (And if you find you're experiencing writer's block on your current project, begin writing something new — a real writer can always write something.) You must produce a body of work to count yourself as a real working pro.

Of our original hundred wannabe writers, only one or two will follow all six rules. The question is: will you be one of them? I hope so, because if you have at least a modicum of talent and if you live by these six rules, you will make it.

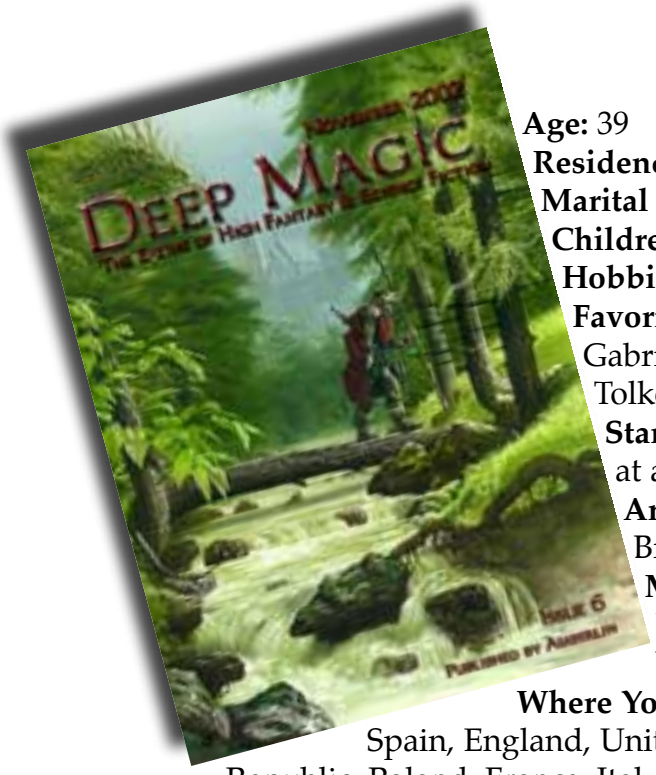
THE END

According to Maclean's: Canada's Weekly Newsmagazine, "By any reckoning Robert J. Sawyer is among the most successful Canadian authors ever." He has sold 15 novels to major U.S. publishers and received 25 national and international awards for his fiction, including the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America's Nebula Award for Best Novel of the Year, and the Crime Writers of Canada's Arthur Ellis Award for Best Short Story of the Year.

Robert has taught creative writing at the University of Toronto, Ryerson Polytechnic University, and the Banff Centre for the Arts.

Robert's website can be found at the following url: http://www.sfwriter.com/

Ciruelo Cabral



Age: 39
Residence: Sitges, Spain (near Barcelona)
Marital Status: Married
Children: Angelo and Lys
Hobbies: Playing guitar, sports, etc.
Favorite Book or Author: *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez; *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkein
Started Painting: At age 18. Became a freelance illustrator at age 21 and never looked back.
Artist Most Inspired By: Roger Dean, Frazetta, Alan Lee, Brian Froud, etc.
Mediums You Work In: Mainly acrylic paints
Educational/Training Background: Fernando Fader in Buenos Aires
Where Your Work Has Been Published or Displayed: Spain, England, United States, Germany, Argentina, Finland, Czech Republic, Poland, France, Italy, Greece, etc.
Contact: ciruelo@dac-editions.com
Website URL: http://www.dac-editions.com/

Q: How did you come to be an artist?
A: On the advice of some of my teachers, my mother sent me to a school which had some artistic courses: drawing, interior decoration and handicraft. Besides the normal classes, I did three specialised years of drawing. At 18 I finished that school and, after a while, joined an advertising agency doing all the menial jobs. Working in that agency, I really learned what's necessary to be independent. I became familiar with the airbrush and all kinds of materials, and I also got to know other illustrators. I left that agency at 20 and ever since I've been a freelance illustrator. So my apprenticeship was really informal, based on practising techniques I saw in books and speaking with other artists. Anyway, hard work was the better school.

Q: How would you describe your work?
A: My work is related to everything that is known as fantastic. When I work professionally for publishers who commission book covers, my work is based on what the writer suggests in his text, so I just try

to fulfill those expectations with as much creativity I can, but when I work free of external expectations, my art is the product of inspiration. I like to let my antennas catch any idea surrounding me at the moment.

Q: Where do you find your inspiration?
A: My main influence is nature, the source of all creativity.

Q: What inspired this piece? (The cover art)
A: Its name is "Cadmo" and I painted it in 1989 to be included in "The Book of the Dragon." It was illustrating the text about the Greek legend of Cadmus the son of Agenor.

Q: What influences have helped you become the artist you are?
A: There are many artists I really admire, whose styles differ very much from each other: Frazetta, Moebius, Alan Lee, and Carlos Nine are artists for whom my admiration is unchanging. I consider it very important to keep technique, drawing, composition and imagination at the same level of quality. That is what the illustrators I mentioned do.

Q: What has been your greatest success in your artistic career?
A: I could say that working for George Lucas on the book covers for the trilogy that is the sequel of the movie "WILLOW" is one of my most important achievements, since that movie has influenced me greatly since 1987.

Q: What trends are you seeing in the Sci-Fi/Fantasy genre?
A: This genre is growing and growing due to the nowadays' factors. I think that we are reaching an interesting point in history: technology is giving us the possibility to deal with the magic of global communication (this is a perfect example), and we are seeing every day that science fiction becoming a daily reality. We are living Fantasy and Sci Fi, and we still don't know if this story is a comedy or a tragedy.

KylaaNn Zn
By Ian Fulton Roberts

The terraformer staggered in the smoke. With arms crossed he shielded himself from the winds' swift swipes, legs straining and shifting and shuffling again, until he regained enough balance to lean into the hellish gusts and lurch ahead. And a big accomplishment this was, to move in any direction, to wrestle the gruff blows of a tempest in this sector of Virginis 70 Alpha that knew no season.

Images flashed in his mind's eye: a chamber, an iridescent blue-green octagon of glass, where a dim jade light pulsed and throbbed rhythmically—the hadron fusion chamber—then a flare of light and flames where none should have been. No, he refused to think of it. He blinked it away, staring now into the present. A thousand tendrils of drifting black snow streaked across his faceplate. Yes, this was better, he thought, the fallout thick and heavy and violent, so utterly violent that a man could lose his sight and… memory.

This was his blood staining the faceplate with each breath, wasn't it? He could feel his lungs filling with warm fluid.

The smoke whipped suddenly west with the wind, and his faceplate cleared.

And he could see.

The bronze fingers of the Virginis sun clawed into the gorge that he called home.

Home. Copper ledges forked above soil so ashen gray that one could not tell where the horizon ended and the nimbus clouds began… save the fleet-footed shadows that darted into the smoke… save the spokes of sunlight that pointed accusatory fingertips at the carnage.

Reinforced triple density gremmyte beams and girders stood here and there so that only their flaming edges gleamed above the smoke like pitchforks hurled by a blind demon. Oh, how ghoulish this landscape looked to him now. The flaming hadron collider, where he once worked — where he once stood, spat volleys of azure sparks high up into a crimson sky brooding with black-ribbed clouds.

He recovered his balance, gripped the shoulder straps of his medpack, and stumbled forward again, bracing himself against the driving lash of the wind and spying at the horizon. Wild smoke, dark fire, ash and topaz light.

But there was still hope, wasn't there? He questioned the notion of hope and focused on the readings in his faceplate, while hearing his breath shaping sounds beneath the sibilant hiss of his helmet.

Yes, there was oxygen. The hard stare of the emerald meter within the translucent grid of his faceplate still read above fifty percent. Winking to look above the oxygen reading, letters eyed him.

"KYLAANN ZN"

"VITAL SIGNS: NORMAL."

But, he thought, this was absurd? This was his blood staining the faceplate with each breath, wasn't it? He could feel his lungs filling with warm fluid. He was hemorrhaging, wasn't he?

"Breathe, blast you" he coughed.

The beating of his heart was hard and fast.

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Notes About the Sword
For Writers Who Don't Own One
By M. Thomas

So you're a knight, right? You have a horse like an elephant on steroids and armor that makes blind men wince. You're mounted up to ride out of the gates from atop which banners wave, assured of victory because at your side you have the legendary weapon blessed by wizards and lauded by poets, your gleaming and noble spatula and…

No, wait.

You're a knight – horse, armor, banners, etc. But you've got your yada yada gardening hoe and…

No, I'm afraid not.

It must be a sword.

It must be a sword, because no great and horrible foe deserves to be vanquished with anything else. A couple of naughty omelets perhaps, or some errant radishes, but a dark force of evil demands a sword, and rightly so. They didn't spend all that time pulling the wings off butterflies to be confronted with a kitchen utensil.

Why all the romantic hullabaloo over swords? Because, phallic inferences aside, swords cut stuff.

Why all the romantic hullabaloo over swords? Because, phallic inferences aside, swords *cut* stuff. The popularity of violence as a way of dealing with conflict isn't a twentieth century invention. You can make it glow and call it a light-sabre if you like, but it's still just a sword all dressed up.

Swords. There are lots of them. This article certainly isn't going to tell you everything you need to know about them. Though it may seem an outlandish notion, not every fantasy writer owns their own sword, nor has friends who do, nor goes to weekend sword-club meetings. If you can scoff and say, "but there's nothing here about the new Armart model S29A shamshir, and she doesn't even *touch* on Simbatta's dragon-motif *bokken*," then you probably need to go write your own article.

This article is just a quick glimpse – a slice, one might say – of sword life. It might bring up a few points that you, as a writer, should remember when putting swords in your story. I do suggest you try these exercises, if you are not a swordsman/woman already. I also suggest you try them outside in the yard. Previous indoor experiments were noted as traumatic to a) decorative lamps, and b) the household cat, which had no business being there in the first place.

Let's start with the basics.

You want something that cuts, but a little longer than the bread-knife. You need a blade.

Traditional swords were made by folding and re-folding hardened strips of iron back on each other. With the right touch and the right blows (enter stereotypically muscle-bound, bald smith), said iron could be narrowed, lengthened, and drawn out like a twenty year-old model in a tube top fit for a six year-old. Then the steel had to be cooled. Water worked best, because blowing on it took too long. Other cooling methods included wine, oil, and (shudder) urine. Pretty much anything wet. They were costly and highly prized, so much so that the owner might give it a name, or even have

religious relics enclosed in the hilt. Speaking of hilts, you may want to stay away from the notion of wooden hilts. It might look pretty in cherry-wood, but it will most likely snap at the first whiff of resistance.

You have your sword.

Traditional swords weren't as heavy as you might think, but the weight worked well once you got it over your head, gravity being what it is. Many swords weighed only about two to four pounds. To get a sense of this, pick up your dictionary and swing it around. Not too bad at first. Now, for the writers, bring the dictionary up over your head and swing it down as if delivering the death-blow to the evil Amadogwa's throat, lying prone at your feet. Suddenly, Amadogwa has produced a dagger from the voluminous folds of his cloak. You must *switch the direction of your downward blow* to parry his dagger pointed at your gut. Not so easy. It might even require two hands, if you can get that shield off your other arm in time.

But you don't want your deity-favored hero waving around some piddly nail-file, do you?

Of course not. Consider this beauty instead. A five-foot, two-handed long-sword, weighing in at about eight pounds. Ahhh. Now that's a sword.

For this experiment you need four of those two-pound hand-weights tied to a sturdy curtain rod/broomstick. Don't ask me how I managed it, although I will say duct-tape played a big part. Swing *that* sucker around. Swing it with intent. Swing it in one direction, so that the momentum works for you. Now.

Change direction mid-swing.

You've knocked that lamp off the end-table, haven't you? I told you to go outside.

You don't have to acknowledge the difficulty of swinging a sword and changing direction mid-swing in your writing. Chances are, most readers won't really mind. But if you're looking for precision and detail, you might consider this experiment. Especially if your hero is a child, or a small woman. They might need to be imbued by the powers of the gods/fairies/magical-person-of-choice to manage this. If not–if they've practiced this sort of thing for years–you might consider the anatomical grotesqueries that would result. Any person constantly wielding an eight-pound sword for years, with one hand, might just have a small hump of muscle on one shoulder. For you writers with sword-wielding heroines, this would be murder on a low-cut décolletage. One shoulder might be higher than the other. One arm might be thinner than the other. One hand bigger and full of blisters, or callus. And anyone who travels with a sword on their hip is going to have some sort of swagger after a while. Not very pretty, but who wants a pretty hero these days?

Back to swords though.

In considering the shape and design of a sword, consider its purpose. Swords that went up against mail had to be designed for cutting. Long, stabby tips. Swords that went up against armor had to be designed for getting into the chinks. Here's your experiment. Try to touch the family dog's left-front armpit with your index finger repeatedly when it's welcoming you home by jumping all over you. Bingo. You have the reason that axes and maces became more popular against armor. It's tough to get a small point into a small space when the space is moving. Axes and maces became popular because they crush stuff, like nearly impervious armor. Ever tried to get the dent out of a tin can? Think about how it would be if that can were encasing your sword arm, and the dent was about halfway between your elbow and your shoulder.

Swords against armor resulted in tussles that usually ended with someone dying of exhaustion, or bashing an opponent so much that they ended up lying on the ground. Then you could draw your dagger and kill them. Time to get over the glamorous idea of one knight thrusting a sword through the breastplate of another after a long battle. In order to get things over with quickly,

your hero must lop off a head or limb. If it's a prolonged battle, wearing an opponent down is the most important. Along with the pointy dagger. If you're going to put the shining ranks of the Obligatory Warriors For Goodness up against Amadogwa's armored troops, chances are your characters will be knocking on your door saying, "listen, the swords are pretty and all, but what I could really use here is a nice, heavy mace."

Swords are nearly quintessential to the fantasy story. If you're just writing about a sword-fight in passing, these details may be enough to help. If your swords and swordfights are integral to the story, go to the web, or seek out some books. But as a writer, you might consider some of the above in the interest of realism, especially if you don't know too much about swords. I'm going to give the obligatory list of references at the end but if you don't have a sword of your own, get a broomstick and retire to the backyard with the intent to do battle on a shrub, or perhaps a lawn-chair. Even if you don't have the weights, just swing your stick. See how hard it is to interrupt momentum mid-swing. Try to pierce a can of vegetables with a toothpick. Go watch a duel put on by your local Society for Creative Anachronism (they reproduce medieval lifestyle and battles). Do. Learn. Write.

Oh. And give your sword a really cool name.

THE END

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Author Interview
Jeff Wheeler

Name: Jeff Wheeler
Age: 31
Residence: Rocklin, CA
Marital Status: Married
Children: 1 daughter, 1 son (due this month, November)
Hobbies: publishing Deep Magic, reading, Shaolin kung fu
Favorite Book or Author: *Elfstones of Shannara* by Terry Brooks
First time you tried to get something published: 1988 (still have the rejection letter from Del Rey Books)
Authors Most Inspired By: Terry Brooks, Sharon Kay Penman, Lloyd Alexander, J.K. Rowling
Educational/Training Background:
Schools Attended: San Jose State University
Degrees: Masters degree—medieval history (1997), MBA (2001)
Published works (fiction/non-fiction/obituaries): *The Wishing Lantern* (hardcover children's story); "*Murder in History 151*" (historical essay); various entries in the Historical Dictionary of Late Medieval England, 1272-1485; *Deep Magic*.
Website URL: http://www.amberlin.com/wishinglantern

Q: Tell us about your day-job.
A: I work as a research analyst in the staffing department at Intel Corporation. I've been with the company for 10 years and have done everything from babysitting training classes on hazardous materials to working night shift as a supervisor in a wafer fab. Right now, I research labor markets all over the world to help Intel determine countries that might be good locations for future projects. It's a great job, but I can't tell you any more about it without having to kill you.

Q: Tell us about the origin of your novel, *Landmoor*? How did you come up with the story? What was the process and development that transformed that idea into a complete novel (trilogy, series, etc.)?
A: The written version of *Landmoor* has been a work in progress for about ten years. The version that is in Deep Magic is the seventh complete re-write of the story. In fact, I've been so frustrated with it at times that it has sat untouched for years. But when I rolled up my sleeves and started over again this last time, it started to click together, and I am very happy with it now. But the story of *Landmoor* is older still. I began work on it when I was fourteen as a D&D campaign that I invented and ran as a Dungeon Master. Thealos, Justin, Flent, Ticastasy…they were all part of the original campaign. So was the city of *Landmoor* and the magic of the Everoot. Of course, the story would not be as interesting if I kept it from the point-of-view of a fourteen year-old, so much has changed to transform it into the novel it is now and the series I'd like it to be.

Q: Where do your get the ideas or inspiration for your work?
A: Many ideas come to me just by breathing. I have rarely had writer's block or been unable to come up with new material. But more than any other source, I find many of my ideas through studying

history – ancient and medieval. The trigger can be a sentence, a story, or a setting – and the thoughts start to run wild in my mind. What if this happened instead of that? What did the historian mean by this statement? Wouldn't this make a fantastic setting to a story? The problem is turning the ideas off so I can finish the project I'm working on presently.

Q: Do you have any favorite characters?
A: I would be lying if I said 'no' – but not all my favorite characters are from *Landmoor*. From this universe, I like Jaerod very well. He is the mentor-like character, the enigmatic one who knows what is really going on. He's my Gandalf. But I did not want to make him a wizened sage with a "gray beard, pointy hat" (nods to LOTR). Rather than relying on a sorceror, I wanted my mentor to be someone that Thealos would admire and desire to be like. In a very real sense, this story is about Thealos' journey to become a Sleepwalker. But there has to be someone who teaches him. There is another character I like who plays an intimate role in this story, but you will not meet that character until the beginning of the sequel.

Q: What influences have helped you become the writer you are?
A: I am the sort of writer who hungers for an audience. Luckily, I have had many people play that role for me during the years. But on the technical side, I learned quite a bit about the craft of writing from pretty traditional sources. I took all the creative writing classes I could in college, but they only brought me so far. I then started joining writing workshops a few years ago and that brought me to the next level. The entire manuscript of *Landmoor* spent six months on the OWW (http://sff.onlinewritingworkshop.com/), and the line-by-line feedback from many of its workshop members proved priceless.

So while I have been working on Landmoor for the last ten years, I have also completed two other "first novels"

Q: What have you been reading lately?
A: I read quite a bit, but I am not as voracious as many who read this e-zine. I have particularly enjoyed Cecelia Dart-Thornton's trilogy (The Bitterbynde) – it is one of the freshest (and cleanest) new voices in fantasy that I've seen. I also follow Terry Brooks, Robin Hobb, and Sharon Kay Penman religiously. But there is also a lot of reading required for Deep Magic, so a lot of my time goes here.

Q: How much of your time do devote to writing?
A: Weekends, mostly. I have a family, a good job, and try to live a pretty balanced life. I spend a lot of time "thinking" about my stories and where I want them to go or new ones that I haven't put on disk yet. But Saturday afternoons are pretty sacrosanct, and I do a lot of my work then.

Q: When you have a time where you don't think you can write another word, what is it that gets you going again?
A: Reading usually unplugs me. I normally do not get to that "can't write another word" phase unless I'm wordsmithing a story for the 100th time and am truly sick of it. While working on a big project, like a novel, I like to take little breaks and work on something else for a while. That allows me to come back fresher and see the novel with new eyes.

Q: What is your motivating factor for writing? What keeps you doing it? Do you think it will ever be your day-job? What's the trade off?
A: I have mixed feelings about this question. Would I like to be the next Terry Brooks or JK Rowling? Who wouldn't? But I am not expecting that. It would take a lot of success in order to convince me to leave the stability of my day job. My biggest fear is that I won't live long enough to write all the stories that are swirling in my head right now.

Q: Give us a peek at what else is up your sleeve? (Sequels? New worlds?)
A: I developed a strategy many years ago. I did not want to spend my time writing a Robert Jordan-like epic only to discover that no one liked the first book. So while I have been working on *Landmoor* for the last ten years, I have also completed two other "first novels" – each one would be the first book of a multi-book series. So, in addition to the universe of *Landmoor*, there are a few others:

Tears of Minya is a story that takes place in a fantasy city the size of medieval Rome, Paris, or London. The entire book takes place within the City of Minya and all the politics and issues of their time. It is a story that I imagined while working on my master's thesis on medieval sanctuary practices. In fact, I even remember the trigger that started this story writing itself. I had a copy of a Latin manuscript written by the abbots of Westminster Abbey during the 12th and 13th centuries. There was a specific line in that document that jumped out at me and gave me the plot of a multi-book story. I then enlisted the help of several friends and wrote the entire first draft by e-mail, letting these friends decide the actions of the main point-of-view characters while I nudged the raft along the plot current. It is a story about a young spy who is new to the City of Minya and how he changes the course of political history. It is also the story of a headsman and his conflicting loyalties between the state church and his heart.

Kingmakers is another first book of a series. I also started it while studying history at San Jose State University. It came as the result of a question – what would have happened if Henry V (the victor of the battle of Agincourt) had lived long enough to face Joan of Arc on the battlefields of France? With a fantasy twist. The story is told from two points of view, separated by 500 years. It is told through the eyes of a medieval history student who is specializing on the life of a controversial and infamous battlefield commander. The other point of view is the young nobleman who becomes the greatest battlefield commander of all time and the chaos his victory causes. Studying our own world's history often reads like a fantasy novel. I thought I would try it the other way around.

Q: Obviously, *Landmoor* does not complete the series, where does the story go from here?
A: If there is enough interest from this audience and we decide to publish *Landmoor*, then my plan is to write the sequel, which picks up one hundred years after Thealos…just kidding. It picks up right where *Landmoor* left off and explores how Thealos must convince the Shae to get involved in the Bandit conflict before it is too late. I have shown how seriously the Shae take a charge of treason, and there are clear reasons in their history as to why. Convincing the Sunedrion will almost be as difficult as convincing Laisha Silverborne herself. And getting back inside the fortress of *Landmoor* will be even more perilous the second time – even with an escort of Crimson Wolfsmen. The sequel will end the saga of the Everoot for now. There are other stories to be told in this universe, but I will tie things up nicely at the end of book two so that readers will have a better feeling of closure. But there are many nuggets and gems hidden through *Landmoor* and its sequel that hint of future stories yet to be told.

Q: Those of us close to the story have watched it evolve over the years. Do you have any scenes, characters, names, etc. that make you cringe when you look back and see where the story came from?
A: Yes, but if I shared them with you, then you would start cringing too. Remember, this story was originally created by a geeky Freshman in high school. I look back at some of my earlier drafts of *Landmoor* (and I have kept most of them) and though I shudder, I also appreciate how much I have grown as writer.

Q: One of the most unique and creative elements of your story is the mysterious plant, Everoot. Please tell us a little more about the plant, such as, where did the idea for Everoot originate?
A: That is a more difficult question because it was so long ago. The concept of a power able to heal or cure someone is not a new invention. Rather than making this power innate in a person, I embodied it in a plant. I did not read Lord of the Rings in its entirety until this year, so there was no twisting of Kingsfoil to a new end. I just remember coming up with the concept – a plant that can heal any wound or cure any sickness. It was something only found in the moors where there is plenty of water. It had a dark side, a potential for great evil as well — just like all the magic in Thealos' world. That is the definition of Forbidden magic – any magic can be twisted. But the Everoot and the name of the fortress city itself have not changed from the original story. Just about everything else…has.

Q: Why did you let DEEP MAGIC publish this novel? There are other avenues in the publishing industry you could have chosen.
A: I went that route and it did not work. I submitted all of these stories to the major fantasy publishers and to agents specializing in the genre. It is very difficult breaking into that arena. While working on my master's degree in business, I studied the publishing industry. There are inefficiencies and economies of scale that make for turbulent seas with established authors, let alone new ones. But I read a Forrester marketing report that said that the sci-fi and fantasy genre was uniquely poised in the industry. The article predicted: "when sword-and-sorcery fans start emailing an unknown writer's latest short story to friends, publishers will take notice and sign up the author." So my partners at Amberlin and I decided to give this a try. We developed the concept of Deep Magic so that we could help other authors and not just ourselves. Our hope is that the readers will tell their friends about their favorite stories and authors and that eventually, the big players in the industry will take notice.

THE END

The Onus
By David Adams

Einan placed a tender kiss on his daughter's forehead. He loved to watch her sleep. She was so peaceful, so beautiful. She was nine years old, full of energy, and all he had left that was important to him. He pulled the blanket over her shoulders and placed a discarded toy under her arm, a gift her mother had made for her years before. The small bear was stuffed with straw and cotton, one eye hanging precariously by a few small threads, ready to snap off at any moment. Ladara never slept without it. He ran his fingers through her hair, dark like her mother's, before quietly standing up and leaving the room. He paused at the door to blow out the candle that lit the small room and glanced briefly again at his daughter, a whimsical smile showing on his face.

He went to the main room and found his hooded cloak, an old, comfortable garment worn thin by years of use. Without a sound, he slipped out the front door and into the warm night air. With a few cryptic gestures and a soft hum, Einan seemed to shimmer where he stood, blurring in and out of normal visibility. It was an old Wizard's trick he learned some time ago, perfect for a man who didn't want to draw attention to what he was doing. He didn't like magic much, it gave him a headache, but it was occasionally handy. Wrapping the cloak tightly around himself, despite the warmth, he started off at a quick pace, not wanting to leave his daughter alone any longer than necessary.

It was an old Wizard's trick he learned some time ago, perfect for a man who didn't want to draw attention to what he was doing.

The streets were empty except for the sleeping forms of beggars in the shop doorways. He made barely a sound as he glided across the cobblestone street, lit softly by the dim light of the street boxes. The stars broke through the night, only occasional clouds hiding them from view. Einan passed without noticing any of it. He never looked, save a momentary glance here and there to keep his way.

Rounding one last corner, Einan found himself standing in front of the Tailored Kitten, a highly reputable tailor shop know for its quality and varied selection. He knew the owner, though only through his patronage of her shop. It was a quiet place, off the path of the main streets of town. With a deliberate slowness, he reached into his tunic and withdrew a small pouch. In it, he found his picking tools. Seconds later, the front door clicked open softly, and he was inside.

Careful not to make a sound, the trespasser found his way through the crowded room, dodging his way past gowns and suits of varying quality and price. Some were exquisite, others plain. He made his way to a rack on the far wall. These items were old, their fashion fading. They were the old pieces available for a mere fraction of the cost of one of the finer dresses found elsewhere in the shop. Einan flipped through the items quickly, pausing briefly at one, tempted to remove it. Ladara would look pretty in it, though it wouldn't fit for another year or two. He continued along until he stopped at an odd pair of pantaloons. Several layers of lace and cloth danced, and he felt the loudly colored fabric between his fingers. The patterns weaved through the display were hypnotic, even in the dim light of the stars shining through the window.

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Harry Potter Goes to Court

Intellectual Property Rights in Literature

(Part II of Copyright Article from September 2002 Issue)

By Brendon Taylor

When I last left off, Harry Potter had soared to the top of the British bestsellers list and made his way to America (on a Nimbus 2000, no less). Once he arrived, young Mr. Potter burst to the top of the American bestseller list more quickly than you could say "Quidditch World Cup." However, on the way up, Mr. Potter's popularity reached the awareness of an American author named Nancy Stouffer. She saw many unsettling similarities in the works by J. K. Rowling and her own children's fiction, written and published more than a decade earlier. Ms. Stouffer advised Ms. Rowling's American publisher of the "similarities" and soon thereafter, the lawyers entered.

She saw many unsettling similarities in the works by J. K. Rowling and her own children's fiction, written and published more than a decade earlier.

That was the introduction to my copyright article in the September issue of Deep Magic. At the time, the case between Ms. Stouffer and Ms. Rowling was still pending, but the court did not sit on the issue long. On September 17, 2002, the United States District Court rendered its decision. Because an overwhelming number of readers expressed interest in that article (at least one who I'm aware of – not counting relatives), and because I ran short of space to address several intellectual property issues relevant to aspiring writers in my previous article, the other editors at Deep Magic have graciously allowed me to write this follow-up.

This article will focus on the court's decision and how it sorted out the intellectual property issues each party raised. Hopefully, I will keep you awake for other 1601 (or so) words.

The case began shortly after Ms. Stouffer contacted Ms. Rowling's American publisher, Scholastic, Inc. However, Ms. Stouffer did not file the lawsuit, which she is quick to remind those who visit her website, www.realmuggles.com. Ms. Rowling, Scholastic, and Time Warner Entertainment Company, which owns American media rights in the movie versions of Ms. Rowling's first two books, filed suit to have the court declare that Ms. Rowling had not violated any of Ms. Stouffer's intellectual property rights and to prevent Ms. Stouffer from making claims and statements to the contrary. Ms. Stouffer counterclaimed and cross-claimed against Ms. Rowling and the other plaintiffs on grounds of copyright and trademark infringement, false designation of origin, unfair competition, and dilution. I will explore each of these intellectual property issues in summary fashion as each is relevant to aspiring writers.

On the issues of trademark infringement, false designation of origin, and unfair competition

In order for a person to prevail (or prove that another has violated her intellectual property rights), she must first show that the alleged violator has used the intellectual property "in a manner likely to cause consumer confusion." Courts assess the likelihood of consumer confusion by looking at the following eight factors:

1. The strength of the claimant's mark
2. The degree of similarity between the claimant and defendant's marks
3. The proximity of the products
4. The likelihood that either party will "bridge the gap" and use the mark on products closer to the other's areas of commerce
5. The sophistication of the buyers
6. The quality of the defendant's product
7. Actual confusion
8. The defendant's bad faith.

The court does not use these factors in a mathematic formula (i.e. the party who racks up the most factors wins). Rather, these factors provide a general framework to help the court decide the ultimate question of whether consumers are likely to be confused as to the source of the two parties' merchandise.

Ms. Stouffer alleged that numerous similarities between her works and Ms. Rowling's were likely to cause consumer confusion. Incidentally, the list of similarities she brought before the court had been trimmed down from the original list posted on her website (which has since been removed). These similarities included Ms. Rowling's use of the terms Muggle, Harry Potter, Nevils, and Nimbus; and the use of the concepts of messenger owls, Well of Desire (Mirror of Erised), and the title, Keeper of the Keys and Grounds.

Muggles. I am going to make a bold assumption that some of you may be unfamiliar with Ms. Stouffer's "muggles". The court characterized them as "tiny, hairless creatures with elongated heads who live in a post-apocalyptic land called Aura… [with] the basic physical characteristics of human beings, but their diminutive size and distorted physical features clearly indicate that they are not human beings." Conversely, Ms. Rowling's muggles are regular folks who have no magical abilities. The court found no likelihood of confusion between the two kinds of muggles.

Harry Potter. Ms. Stouffer had even more trouble proving a likelihood of confusion between Ms. Rowling's Harry Potter and her own, Larry Potter. Ms. Stouffer alleged that she authored a character named Larry Potter, who had a friend named Lilly (the same name as Harry Potter's mother). However, the plaintiffs showed that in Ms. Stouffer's work, Larry Potter appeared in only one passage and on the title page. Furthermore, those two appearances occurred in a font that differed from the rest of the work… and that font was not in existence when the rest of the work was produced. Yet, even assuming Larry was a valid character, the Court again found no likelihood of confusion.

Nevils and Nimbus. Ms. Stouffer lost again. (Sorry to ruin the surprise.) Although her works and Ms. Rowling's contain "Nevils" and "Neville" respectively, Neville happens to be a very popular British name and the terms (characters) are so dissimilar as to not create any likelihood of confusion. Likewise, "Nimbus" is a common term found in the dictionary and does not represent a fanciful creation by either party. Again, these terms are used quite differently: Rowling's is a flying broom and Stouffer's is a warrior and prime minister of the cloud people. No confusion

Messenger Owls. Stouffer's problem here is that none of her works contain messenger owls who deliver mail. She does have an albino hawk named Seymour who acts as a scout and delivers food to a group of muggles on an island. Still no confusion.

Mirror of Erised. In *Harry Potter and the Sorceror's Stone* (Philosopher's Stone for those of you across the ocean), Harry encounters a mirror that allows those who look into it to see their greatest desires. Ms. Stouffer's "Well of Desire" gives those who drink from it the ability to solve any ques-

tion or problem easily. Although both magical objects have a form of the word "desire" in them, the court found that they would not create a likelihood of confusion. The court called them "completely different objects which perform dissimilar functions."

Keeper of… Ms. Stouffer's works included a few "Keepers" of various items. Similarly, Ms. Rowling's work included the famous Hagrid, Keeper of the Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts. Yet "keeper" is a common term used to describe a particular job. As the "keepers" in the two works had vastly different jobs, the court found no likelihood of confusion.

Dilution and Tarnishment

The Court then addressed Stouffer's claims of *dilution* and *tarnishment*, which are claims a party may assert when another has caused injury to that party's business reputation. In order to prevail on these claims, one must own "an extremely strong mark" that is either distinctive or has acquired secondary meaning. Having a regular trademark that another uses is not nearly enough. Examples of "extremely strong marks" include Kleenex, Crayola, McDonalds, and Deep Magic. Okay, I threw that last one in to make sure you were still paying attention. I'm pretty sure that if an entrepreneur opened a fast food restaurant called McDougals (e.g. Eddie Murphy's "Coming to America"), which featured "Big Mc's" and a giant golden "M" sign in beautiful yellow, that entrepreneur would soon be talking to lawyers himself.

In Ms. Stouffer's case, her alleged (though not proven) trademark was "Muggles." Ms. Stouffer's problem here was that sales of *Rah* and *The Legend of Rah and the Muggles* were "meager at best." The highest number of these books that possibly could have sold was six thousand. Not too bad for a small market press, but certainly not enough to create an "extremely strong mark." And then, there was the problem with substantiating even that many sales. The best evidence of these sales was an invoice of sales by the publisher to a distributor in 1989. Yet the publisher's former employee, whose name was listed on the invoice, and the customer, who purportedly purchased the books, testified that the transactions never took place.

Again, even if Stouffer's works sold to the extent she claimed, the Court found that "no reasonable juror could find that such use [of "Muggle"] was sufficient to establish that the mark was 'extremely strong.'"

Copyright

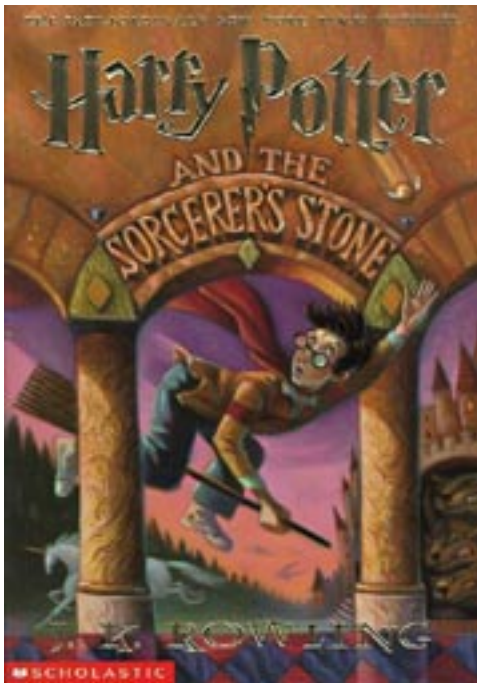
All that was left was copyright infringement. Seems like that's where we started. The copyright issue the court reviewed was the cover art for the Harry Potter books versus an illustration from *Larry Potter and His Best friend Lilly*. The standard the court used in this analysis is whether the illustrations are "substantially similar." If that rings a bell for you, thanks for reading my previous article (or for otherwise being abreast of the copyright standard). If it does not, but you have a desire to read all about a "substantial similarity" analysis, check out my article in the September Issue by clicking here.

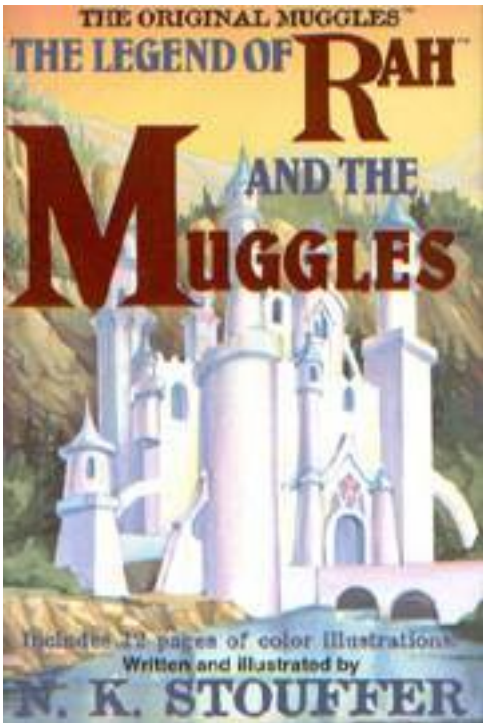
In the case at hand, Harry and Larry Potter are both young boys with dark hair and glasses. Those attributes are far too generic to afford copyright protection. The protectible elements of Ms. Stouffer's illustration of Larry Potter are his facial features and the shape and color of his glasses. Those elements are not replicated in Ms. Rowling's Harry Potter illustrations. Furthermore, the court heard no evidence that Ms. Rowling's illustrator had access to Ms. Stouffer's works prior to his rendition of Harry Potter.

As you may have already guessed, Ms. Rowling won. But, what does "winning" mean? In this case, it meant quite a lot. Not only did Ms. Rowling win her case and have all of Ms. Stouffer's claims dismissed, but the court awarded sanctions against Ms. Stouffer for fraud against the court. This is a bit of a side-note, but it may serve as a warning about the dangers of not being careful with the evidence presented at court. As was alluded to earlier, Ms. Stouffer submitted documents to the court, which she swore to be true and accurate, that Plaintiffs' proved to be fraudulent because critical passages of such documents were typed in fonts not in existence at the time the documents were purported to have been created.

The result of submitting such documents in this case was a sanction against Ms. Stouffer in the amount of $50,000 and an order that she pay the Plaintiffs' costs and attorney fees (most of them at any rate). Of course, litigation is slow to truly die and Ms. Stouffer has filed a motion asking the court to reconsider. She is also considering filing an appeal if this motion is denied. For more information about her side of this case, read her official statement on her website: www.realmuggles.com. For more information on intellectual property rights, talk to your friendly neighborhood attorney.

THE END





The Artwork of Tony Hough

Titles:

After a Long Silence (left)
The Rot (bottom left)
Byakhee (bottom right)

View more artwork by Tony Hough at:

http://uk.photos.yahoo.com/tonyhough2000

Continued from Issue 5

Landmoor
By Jeff Wheeler

XXX

The hall torches hissed and sputtered, making Thealos squint as he passed them and turned the corner. He was flanked by a dozen Bandit soldiers, each one wearing a sword at their belts and tunics of black and gold. Ahead walked the Sorian with his green-fringed robes whispering across the paving stones. The Bandits said nothing, neither to Thealos nor to the Sorian. He wondered whether he was quick enough to slip past the guards behind him. He wondered, but he didn't dare. Two soldiers followed, dragging Justin's limp body.

The tunnel rose in a steep slope that ended at a large iron door, its hinges embedded into the rock. It creaked and Thealos was ushered into a cell block. A few sallow faces stared at them from the shadowed corners. Rats peeked down from the rafters while roaches skittered across the floor, only to be crushed underfoot by the guards. The corridor ended at a sharp stairwell leading up. Thealos kept going, but he retraced the steps in his mind as to how they had reached that point. They were far from the whispering magic of the Silverkin Crystal. The soldiers dragging Justin didn't follow him up the stairs. Instead, they took him towards another passageway deeper within the tunnels.

Entering the waiting chamber at the top of the steps, Thealos saw a row of low-hanging iron chandeliers. They were as wide as wagon wheels with thick black chains suspending them from the web of arches above. The air held the aroma of kitchen smoke coupled with the smells of bread, cheeses, and salted meats. Deeper into the hall, they passed the kitchens, and Thealos spied large hearth fires with roasts twisting on the skewers. Bread ovens were open, revealing oval loaves of golden bread. The cook slid them out with a long wooden paddle. Further down the hall, two well-fed dogs skirted away from the advancing guards and then watched them take Thealos away.

The guards stopped at a lacquered oak door bound with iron hinges and decorated with fluted gold work. It was certainly Silvan in design, reminding Thealos of Elder Nordain's private chamber in Avisahn. The Sorian faced the guards. "Go to the kitchens for something to eat. You'll be called when you are needed."

Thealos watched them nod in respect before retreating back down the corridor. The Sorian motioned for Thealos to enter first and then followed, shutting the heavy oak door behind him. The smell of Forbidden magic clung

BOOK PROPOSAL: Landmoor

We are considering publishing Landmoor in paperback. We have set up a portion of our website to discuss this possibility with those readers who might be interested. There you will get a chance to add your input and your voice on the idea and subscribe to a separate mailing list for news on Landmoor's publication. Click here to go to that page.

to the Sorian's skin like smoke, but the overwhelming feeling of terror was not as strong as it was near the Crystal. Perhaps the Sorian had to invoke the dark power to protect him while being so near the ancient talisman. But just because Thealos wasn't gagging with terror, he was not all that relieved. He had no idea who he was about to meet. Lord Ballinaire perhaps? The governor of Landmoor?

Entering the room, Thealos stood face to face with Secrist and stopped suddenly. But it wasn't. He frowned, instantly wary, and felt fear bloom in his stomach. The man who sat in the large chair had the facial features of the Kiran Thall, but his cheekbones weren't as high and his forehead a bit broader. The resemblance was unmistakable though. Who was this man? Seeing Thealos enter, the man rose from the chair and planted his hands on the fat table in front of him. He was taller than even Sturnin Goff and his shoulders were broad and strong. A thick red cape hung over his rich tunic, but Thealos could see the glint of a hauberk beneath it. The cape was smoke-stained and tattered along the fringe.

"He was alone?"

The Sorian walked past Thealos, his arms folded. "She is still outside the city, but should be reaching the gatehouse within the hour. The guards are waiting for her." The Bandit leader nodded slowly. "This one," the Sorian continued, "was with a Warder Shae near the forbidden section of the tunnels. Apparently they separated after slipping through the regiment last night. His identity is no longer concealed by the Silvan magic. His protector failed in the Shadows Wood."

Thealos watched the exchange, not sure what to think. He thought they might be talking about Ticastasy and Jaerod, but he wasn't sure of the context. "And what about the Warder I came with. Is he still alive?" Thealos asked.

The Sorian smiled with amusement. "Oh, he'll recover. But I'm having him secured in a special cell. Old dungeon bars would not hold him very long."

Thealos nodded, relieved that Justin would survive. His worry for Ticastasy and the others chafed at him. "Who are you?" he asked the man standing behind the table.

"You crossed my army last night," the man replied with a grim tone. "And a dead Sleepwalker is hardly an even trade, if he is truly dead." He gave Thealos a narrow look. "I'm Tsykre Phollen."

"You have a brother," Thealos said, trying to keep the loathing from his voice.

The Bandit leader's expression didn't change. "I understand you met him in Sol."

Thealos nodded. He felt sick to his stomach with fear but was determined to hide it from the other man. He prayed that his negotiation skills would help him. "We were…introduced. I understand you wanted to see me?"

The Bandit straightened and paced away from the table, clutching his hands behind his back. Thealos nearly flinched when he moved, but he kept himself steady. The man stared at a tapestry hanging from the wall of the study, but his eyes weren't fixed on it. "We'll start with the simple questions and go from there. Do not bother lying to me, Shae, as hard as that may be to resist. My friend over there will know if you do. If you try to conceal the truth, he will compel it from you. Believe me – he can. The first question – why did you take her?" he asked in a low voice. Turning

Landmoor

click to view larger image

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roam of the castle grounds.

"But back to the knight. He would scowl darkly - he had the darkest scowl the princess had ever seen - at the other knights when they meandered off, barely sober enough to stay on their horses. And then he would call up to the tower to make sure she was all right. 'M'lady? Has the dragon got ye?' She would answer 'no,' and he would go back to patrolling the walls. It was quite a task, patrolling those walls, since you couldn't complete a full circuit. You would get to the end of the third wall, and then have to turn around and go back the way you came. There was a row of hedges where the fourth wall should be, but no one was quite sure if it would keep out an invading army. The knight didn't seem to think it would, and he fussed constantly over it. Nobody paid any attention. Invading army, indeed!

Grandmother snorted softly. "And right they were… should've removed the other walls as well, for all the good they did."

Mother ignored her. "It was quite, peaceful, and happy. The princess liked her tower, the knight was content to defend her from the odd rat or pigeon now and again, and the townspeople were generally pleased with minding their own business, doing townspeople things and wondering if anything interesting would happen.

"And one day, it did." At this point, Mother lowered her voice, leaning forward conspiratorially. The children's eyes widened. "The dragon hit them just before lunch. The knights were out in the courtyard, having a fencing match. Two had already retired to the sidelines for more wine... they said it was for medicinal purposes. But *the* knight was the first to see the dragon coming, since he was up on the wall, as usual. He called out a warning, but the knights just laughed. They thought it was a joke, and a very funny one at that. They congratulated him on his wit, and invited him down for some wine and weaponry. He was turning purple by this time, and came down the stairs to give them a piece of his mind.

"It was a little too late. About the time he reached the bottom of the stairs, the dragon landed in the courtyard. It was a vicious battle, though mostly one-sided, and one the princess, watching from her perch in the tower, would never forget. There were twenty-five knights when it began. The fight moved across the courtyard from one side to the other, the knights struggling valiantly to determine just what was happening — past that hazy barrier of drink. The dragon was an ugly brute, purple and green, covered with knobbly bits. It was almost the size of one of the towers, but the knight from the wall was pushing it back, blocking every blow from its tail, dodging its teeth and the flame spitting from its mouth. The hedge lit on fire about halfway through the fight, which took care of that problem. The dragon was gobbling knights left and right, throwing others into walls and through windows. One actually came pretty close to the window the princess was watching from, but he missed. The dragon was having a bit of trouble getting past the one knight who stood in his way, defending the tower. It had apparently not occurred to the beast that it still had wings, and all this fighting nonsense was a complete waste of time. The princess thought at the time that it might be hungry or something.

"It didn't seem to be doing so well any more though. Perhaps a spot of indigestion; it had eaten fourteen knights, after all, and the way it was flinging itself - and others - around would be enough to tire anyone. After one moment where it looked about ready to be violently sick, it took flight, hopping right over the knight. It crashed through the wall of the tower, snatched the princess, and flew away, stumbling through the air like a cow that has just recently learned how to fly, but does not seem quite certain where it's going.

"Knight should have gone home," Grandmother interrupted. "Silly princess wasn't doing anyone any good up in that tower anyhow."

"The knight," Mother continued firmly, "Was a very brave and valiant sort of person. The first thing he did was go into town to find the princess' mother, who, by the way, was not, nor had ever been, a queen. He informed her that the princess had been abducted by a giant purple dragon, and he was off to rescue her. As a courtesy, he was telling her about it beforehand, just in case he didn't make it. He was also a very practical knight. He went back out and was about to get on his horse when the woman told him she'd like to go with him. Perhaps she could be of some assistance, she said. What it really came down to was that she worried the knight had ill intentions toward the princess.

"Smart lady," Grandmother muttered.

"The knight was hesitant at first, but he finally agreed to let her come along. And off they went on his horse. They traveled to the mountains, or, more specifically, Ugly Mountain. It was the biggest mountain, had many caves, and was surrounded by a moat of lava which no man had ever been able to cross or bridge. Obviously, the dragon must live here. If it didn't, the knight was in serious trouble, since he hadn't had the presence of mind to watch the dragon when it left to see where it was headed.

"They reached the lava moat within the hour. This kingdom wasn't very large, you see. You could cross from the mountains on one side to the river on the other in just a few hours on a good horse. Walking, maybe eight hours; on a bad horse, you might never get there. Roads tended to go in circles back then, and bad horses never seem to know where they're going. Well, they reached the moat. The woman was very frightened. She knew no one had ever crossed this lava. But the knight told her not to worry, his horse could jump it, no problem. They backed up a few hundred yards, and then the knight commanded his horse, 'Traverse yon lava, noble steed!' And traverse it did. That horse may have broken a few records that day, landing safely some fifteen yards beyond the moat.

"Caught a sputter of lava on its rear halfway across, if you ask me," said Grandmother. Mother didn't pause.

"They went up the mountain, round and round and round until the horse was almost too dizzy to walk. If the path had suddenly straightened out, they would have all gone over the edge together. But they made it. At the top of the mountain was the lair of the dragon. The first cavern was empty, bare to the walls. But there were tunnels leading into the mountain, and the knight soon found the Big Cavern, as he called it. And there was the dragon, laying across its bed of gold and jewels. No one was ever quite sure where it got the gold and jewels, since the kingdom had neither. But it did, and that was that. The princess was in the back of the cavern, locked in an iron cage, waiting patiently for a rescuer. To pass the time, she yelled insults at the dragon. The knight found this very amusing, and paused at the entrance to the cavern to listen for a while. He said later that he learned at least three new words during that time, but the princess never believed him.

"Finally, when the princess' voice was starting to go hoarse, the knight stepped forward and uttered his challenge. 'Release yon princess, vile creature, or I will be forced to dispatch ye!' The dragon turned toward the knight, almost welcoming someone new to talk to, or rather, be talked at by. 'Grr,' said the dragon. 'What, ye cannot speak?' the knight asked. 'Ugly *and* stupid?'

"The dragon thought *that* was very amusing. 'Of course I can speak, good knight,' he said. 'I was merely searching for the appropriate words for a warrior of your standing. As for your request, I am afraid I cannot comply. The princess is mine, fairly stolen, and unless you wish to steal her back, she is mine to keep.'

"'It was not a request, brute!' the knight said. 'Now, to the death!' The knight unsheathed his sword, but the dragon seemed hesitant. 'What is it, beast?' the knight challenged. 'Afraid, are ye?'

"'Not afraid, good knight,' said the dragon. 'Merely tired. Quite frankly, I don't feel well at all. Could you come back later? I may have indigestion due to the copious amounts of your companions I consumed at the castle.' The knight was astounded at first. A dragon, refusing to fight? But then he came up with a plan, deemed very clever at the time.

"'Oh, well in that case, I have just the s'lution for ye. I just so happened to have brought my horse, one o' the most d'lectable bits of meat you'll ever find. And a perfect cure for indigestion, I might add.' The dragon's ears perked at this, and he looked about, almost expecting the horse to be there already. 'I can go get it, if ye want,' the knight added hastily.

"'But how can I be assured of your return?' the dragon asked. 'Leave the woman here, so I know you will come back.'

"'Why'n earth *wouldn't* I come back?' the knight asked, indignant. 'It's the princess I'm after. I couldn't care less about this woman!' But the dragon wouldn't let go of the idea, and finally the knight agreed."

"As if she were his property," said Grandmother, with an angry look. "'Couldn't care less', indeed!"

"Oh, mum…" Mother sighed, shaking her head.

"Well, go on with your story. You're keeping the children waiting!"

"Hmph. Where was I?"

"The knight went to get the horse?" asked one of the children.

"Ah yes. The knight went to get the horse, which he had left outside the entrance to the caverns. Horses don't like caves. No sooner had he left, however, than the dragon crawled forward and grabbed the woman. It put her in the cage with the princess, her daughter. When the knight returned with his horse, he was furious.

"'What's the meaning of this?' he bellowed. 'I leave this woman as a gesture of goodwill… *temporary,* mind you…and you throw her in a cage?'

"'Now, do calm down,' the dragon replied. 'I didn't *throw* her in the cage. I *stuffed* her in the cage. There's a notable difference between *throwing* and *stuffing*. I've just put her there for safety, in case you decide to do something violent.' Now, the knight thought this was all so much hogwash, but he wasn't getting anywhere arguing.

"'Here's the horse,' he said. The words had barely escaped his mouth before the dragon grabbed the horse and stuffed it into its mouth, whole.

"'It's a bad habit of mine,' the dragon mumbled, chewing. 'Overeating. Can't help it. Very bad for me.' That said, the dragon keeled over on its bed of gold and jewels, fast asleep and snoring uproariously. The knight let out a resounding cry of triumph, then crept over to the dragon, drawing his sword once more.

"'Farewell, dragon. A worthy opponent, but brains once more prevail o'er brawn!' Thus said, he lopped off the creature's head with a sweeping blow of his sword. Blood and horse everywhere."

"Messy," Grandmother mumbled. She had finished her sewing for the time being, and was now listening like the children.

"What happened next?" one of the children asked.

"Well, the knight set the princess and the woman free, and they all set out from the caverns together. However, the knight had made a very small tactical error. His horse was gone. Now they had no way to get back across the moat. There were no bridges, and the dragon obviously didn't own any horses."

"Did they *die* there?" the same child asked.

"No. They found an underground garden by an underground river in one of the dragon's

caverns. It had apparently liked some fruit and things when it wasn't eating knights or horses. They settled down there in the caverns. The knight and the princess got married, sort of, had some children, and lived happily ever after."

A long silence followed the end of the story. Finally, one of the girls spoke, her brow wrinkled in concentration.

"They lived in caveses for the rest of their lifes?"

"Well, they went outside sometimes, to look at the stars," Mother replied. "And the knight was always hard at work, trying to find a way to get his family off the mountain."

"*We* live in caves," one of the boys said distractedly, eyeing his new pair of leggings.

"And we have a garden and a river and a big cave full of gold and jewels and an iron cage…" said the girl.

"I think your children get their brains from their father," Grandmother said wryly. Mother rolled her eyes.

"Hullo there!" came a booming voice. The children leapt up from the floor and rushed across the room, screaming 'Father!' and 'Daddy!' "Hey kids."

"We were just talking about you," Mother said with a smile, slipping out of her chair.

"All good I hope."

"Of course. I've been telling the kids the story. How did it go today?"

"Oh, you know, the usual… kept the fire burning. No one'll ever notice, 'course, since we're on a volcano anyway. Tried layin' another dragonbone-bridge across the moat, but I underestimated the distance…it fell in."

"Oh dear… well, maybe tomorrow will be better."

"Who knows, maybe," Father said, planting a kiss on Mother. "But hey, we're happy here, right?"

THE END

Leave a message about this story.

Continued from page 14

There were so many old lost worlds woven into the storm. To him it was the lonely soul-numbing sight that he had eyed when he was a child. A boy of eight years, fighting to draw breath in the cryo-chamber, the twisted faces of the dead crew staring at him with cold swollen eyes and mouths fixed in that ugly soundless scream. The colony shuttle to Tau Ceti Arcstation 10. The cold hand of his memory tugged at him and he paused long enough to think on that dark time, and remember. The winds' roar rumbled in his helmet, laughed at his back, and shrieked through his mind. He lost his footing, dropped his thoughts. He shifted his weight to fight the wind and lurched ahead again.

Was he alone, now? And where were the others—those who once manned the biosphere processor, his companions? Could they have survived, too?

The wind lashed out at him, lifting him from the flames. To him it was a cold fist that snatched his heartbeat and choked his thoughts and tossed him into weightlessness, carrying him a little way, only to hurl him to a shaft of splintered steel.

He licked his lips, tasting salt and copper, tasting sweat and blood. Sweat. And blood… and hard breaths soiling his faceplate and the sour stench of zanthyte fuel stinging his nose. Yet this did not much matter to him, the terraformer, the man who somehow felt he had robbed death.

He peered out into the horizon and spied a riotous burst of sunlight, a big, bright blaze of gold and bronze and topaz, beyond what could have been a pillar of steel or ice. He freed himself from the shoulder straps of his medpack, careful not to lose his balance, mindful of the wind's fickle whip, yet his thoughts were on the others: Ithkirio, Arlovelken.

Are they alive, somewhere? Impossible. How could they have survived? How did I survive?

He set his mind to work. What would he need from the medpack? How should he know — he was no doctor. But he knew enough of medicine from all those close calls years ago, those solitary moments when he, Kylaann, shook free from death's noose.

The florescent-green vial? No, this is for seizures. No, not yet. I have used this once before when I was near death. Ah, but this one.

He shook the foil pack. Hands trembling, fumbling with the seal, he brushed the ash from the edges. Yes, he thought, this might pull him through. He tore the seal.

He could see the orange cloud rising, over his left shoulder, just beyond the second hadron collider.

Wind. Hard winds. Winds whipping out over the carnage, streaking eastward over the smoke, sweeping towards him. A strong gust gripped him, slapped him. He fought the blows, flaying his arms and driving his legs deeper into the ground, anything to gain leverage, anything to avoid...

He felt weightless now, snatched by those fast fickle fingers that cared not what they clutched. To feel his spine fisted by the wind again, to feel his lungs collapse when his legs and arms flayed this way and that way on a mindless yo-yo, as the wind whistled in his mind: "Know me and know my sport." This horrified him.

Images came to his mind, again. White light splintered into his thoughts, blinding him to the memory of Arlovelken making his way towards him in long, slow and desperate strides, waving his arms and screaming.

Then his sight cleared.

And he could see again.

And he could see them.

And they were alive.

Hunkered down amid the rubble, feverishly flexing hands and fingers over a body wedged in

gremmyte steel, they worked.

They were trembling and they were tossing gear from their medkits and they were gripping each other and moaning into the storm.

Their voices boomed and echoed in his eardrum: "Kylaann, Kylaann." How he could he hear them so clearly he did not know. Their faceplate visors glinted and shimmered in the twilight as the static in his helmet crackled and fizzled.

To see the others work to revive the body that was once his did not disturb the terraformer.

Somehow, he heard them tearfully summoning the body before them back to life saying, "Don't you quit on us, Kylaann—don't you dare leave us now."

He stumbled towards them, hearing them cry out over the body, "Fight, Kylaann." He fought to contain his joy and stopped by the pane; he longed to grip their shoulders to comfort them. He called out to reassure them.

They did not respond.

Yes, the experiment had been a success. They had proven the existence of the twentieth-century theory of Calibi-Yau space, a window into a curled-up dimension of space-time. After three centuries of failed experiments, it had taken a three-man outpost team in a desolate gorge and an untimely accident to prove that it was real.

No, there was no grief for the terraformer as he called out their names into the storm, as he fought to comfort his colleagues on the other side of the pane.

He wanted to tell them that the theory was correct. He wanted to tell them that he was there and elsewhere. And he summoned his thoughts and projected his will into the storm saying, "I'm here, I'm alive—do not cry for me."

At peace he was, the terraformer, until he saw his other body rise and answer them.

THE END

Leave a message about this story.

Continued from page 22

He reached inside one of the pockets and withdrew a piece of paper, the object of his late-night excursion. If the shopkeeper only knew how he used her store...

Without looking at the note, the man slipped quietly out the door, taking care to lock it behind him to avoid suspicion. He moved quietly through the streets, wondering what his next assignment would be. The payment he had received was substantial, signaling a job of some importance, at least for the one needing his services. He was often surprised at how much people were willing to pay before a job was even done. He could just take the money and run, but he would never do that. He took pride in his work, and in his reputation. It took years to build, but it could tumble in mere seconds.

Back at his home, his cloak thrown carelessly on the floor, Einan sat on a chair in the corner. Reaching over to a small table next to the chair, he picked up a worn sack and dumped the contents in his lap. Nearly a hundred gold coins tumbled out. Einan shook his head in disbelief. He still had trouble grasping that amount of money. It wasn't the most he had been paid, but it was more than he'd seen for a single job in years. He had retrieved the sack of gold from one of his drop locations early in the day. There he had left a cryptic note with specific arrangements involving the Tailored Kitten.

He withdrew the small piece of paper and unfolded it deliberately, a chill of excitement running through him to see where his next job would take him.

* * *

The market screamed with activity as Einan and Ladara emerged from their home. Vendors pitched their wares to everyone who passed, trying vainly to be heard above the din. The two started off, dodging the aggressive merchants and stopping at those of interest. A weaponsmith, new to market, displayed a fine assortment of blades; the hilts decorated with hand-stitched leather pommels. A farmer from the Outer Plains boasted the juiciest of fruits, from oranges and red berries to yellow persimmons. A woman sold hand-woven baskets from Jenuvia, while across from her another farmer sold dirty carrots by the carton.

Everything could be found at market, but finding a desired item required patience. The merchants were sprawled out through the city streets, like ivy wrapped around an old house, leaving no corner untouched. They cared little for organization, only to be seen and heard. Farmers and weaponsmiths sold side-by-side, so to find a particular item required work. But the selection was endless.

Father and daughter wove their way through the market, hand in hand. They always went together, sampling fruits, breads, and cheeses from the entire region. Ladara's face was lit with excitement through it all. The numbers and offerings awed her, despite having been to market many times before.

They always ended at the pastries. Soft, sweetened biscuits injected with jam were their favorite. They were glazed and browned to perfection with a light buttersauce that gave them an inviting shine and a sweet taste. And only one baker could make them the way they liked.

"Hello, Ladara," Joenne greeted the two as they approached her cart. Her voice was full of warmth and excitement. "Back for some more?"

"Yes, ma'am," came the soft reply. Ladara held out some coins and dropped them in the woman's outstretched hand.

Einan looked on with a faint smile, his eyes never leaving Joenne. Her biscuits were not the only reason he frequented her booth at market. She was beautiful. Her hair, golden in the morning light, was tied and knotted into a bun that crowned her head. She wore simple garments under an

apron covered with jams, butter stains, and flour. She always wore a smile.

Einan took a biscuit, handing one to his daughter, and bit into it, savoring the flavor of his favorite food. "How are you today, Joenne? Is business well?"

The baker turned to him and shrugged. "Not too bad today, Einan." Her eyes sparkled, though. He knew she was being modest. Her pastries were the best in town, and she probably made more money than most of the other merchants. But to look at her, it wasn't obvious. She never wore expensive gowns or exotic perfumes. She always seemed content with what she had. Einan thought back to some of the prettier dresses at the Tailored Kitten. He would love to make one a gift to her. But he knew he wouldn't.

"I'm sure you're doing better than the others, Joenne. With these pastries, you're sure to." He smiled as the woman flushed. She was shy about compliments, but he knew they were appreciated. She cared a great deal for her work. Much as he did for his.

"So, how are the wedding plans?" he continued.

Joenne beamed. "Aron has everything ready. Just one more week. I'll be getting my dress soon, and all the arrangements are made." She helped other customers as she spoke. "Will you survive without my biscuits for the two weeks I'll be away?"

Einan chuckled. "Probably not. I know Ladara won't." His daughter smiled up at him, her mouth lined with strawberry jam from the biscuit. She took another large bite.

"Well," the woman answered, "I guess you'll have to take a few extras with you then, won't you?" She bent over, leaning close to the dark-haired girl. "Will you be bringing your father to my wedding, Ladara?"

She nodded emphatically, her mouth too full of food to speak.

"Good. I'm looking forward to seeing you both there." The baker ran her hand through the girl's hair, leaving a faint trace of flour on her head, and stood up, returning to her other customers.

Einan took his daughter by the hand and turned to leave. "Good-bye then, Joenne. I'll guess the next time we see you will be at the wedding." The woman waved to him with a smile as they left.

He felt so alive when he spoke with her, so dead when he left. Being in love with another man's betrothed was not something he wished for himself. But soon, it wouldn't matter. She would never be his. He sighed as he continued down the streets, hand-in-hand with his daughter.

* * *

The lakeside was deserted that evening. Most people were enjoying the parties and celebrations following market, but Einan and Ladara rarely stayed for them. Their tradition was to go to the lake and enjoy the solitude. The sun was still an hour from setting, and it cast a shimmering reflection along the lake. Ladara was a silhouette, swimming in the waters, as her father watched from the shore.

Einan propped himself on one elbow, staring out to the lake, only half-watching his daughter splash and swim. His thoughts were elsewhere. They turned from Joenne, to his next assignment, and back to his daughter. Thinking of Ladara inevitably led him to thoughts of his wife, dead for 7 years. His daughter had no real memories of her, but he had more than enough to share, though he found that he only shared them with her when prodded to do so. It hurt to stir up those memories. Her death had been long and painful, and his guilt over not ending her misery earlier never left him. He had been selfish, not wanting to lose her company, despite the pain she was enduring.

Caught in his thoughts, Einan didn't hear what his daughter shouted to him from the waters.

He looked over to her and knew immediately what she said. She was going to swim to the peninsula and back. She did it each time she came to swim. The peninsula was no more than an outcropping in the lake, about a half-mile down. Ladara was an excellent swimmer for her age, and she'd made the trip many times before.

As she turned to begin, Einan seized the opportunity he knew would come. He grabbed a long, slender sack and flung it casually over his shoulder as he stood up. Glancing back, Einan watched his daughter swim farther away. He would have plenty of time without her even noticing he had left.

The shore gave way quickly to thick foliage and trees a mere hundred feet from the water. The dense growth of scrub brush between the broad trunks made the going slow, but for Einan it was not too difficult. He picked his way through the trees and brush with ease until he neared the edge of the small forest. Just beyond the trees was a small lagoon, secluded away, though not unknown. He thought about making himself less visible, with the help of his simple magic, before reaching the edge of the trees. He decided against it and continued a few more feet.

There he saw her. Much like Ladara and he, Joenne also enjoyed the solitude of the lake after market. It, too, was her ritual to come here and enjoy the sunset after a busy day. She lay on the ground, a small blanket the only protection between her and the coarse sand beneath her. Her eyes were closed as she propped herself on both elbows, head leaning back and long hair blowing lightly in the breeze. It was a beautiful evening, and she looked radiant.

Einan watched her for a short while. He cherished these moments spying on the woman he loved. He lost himself as he stood there, nervous and afraid. She would never be his. It pained him, but he had higher priorities. Ladara was all that mattered. He gave her a good life, all she needed. And he had a professional reputation that was unrivaled, even if no one knew who he really was.

He sighed and dropped silently to the ground, opening his bag. With a practiced motion, he withdrew a bow, its wood polished to a deep, red shine. It was a beautiful weapon, one he made himself, years ago. It had a tight pull, weighed perfectly for his strength, allowing him to gain the best accuracy and distance possible. From the bag he also took a single arrow, its shaft long and straight, made of the same red wood as the bow. After stringing the bow with a quick movement, the assassin turned to his prey.

It nearly tore his heart apart as he pulled back on the bowstring. The weapon creaked in anticipation as the man took aim. He loved this woman. Maybe not as much as he had loved his wife, but he loved her nonetheless. And the biscuits. How he loved her biscuits.

He steadied his aim.

Who would want her dead? Why? She was only a baker. Maybe it was the money. She was very successful. But killing her would do nothing to gain anyone wealth. Maybe her future husband, but he had more wealth than she. He was a minor lord from a wealthy family. But with Joenne dead before the wedding, Einan doubted Aron would even benefit. But who? A rival baker? Perhaps. Or maybe a scorned lover? Someone rejected in favor of her current betrothed? He could easily identify with such a man.

His aim wavered slightly.

Could he do it? Never before had he doubted an assignment. He worked quickly, quietly, and effectively. It was all he ever wanted to be. His reputation as an assassin was unmatched, and it provided him the means to give his daughter a perfect life. Near perfect, anyway. The life of an assassin's daughter wasn't ideal, but she would hopefully never know.

But now, peering down the shaft of the arrow at his target, he doubted whether he could do it. Was it worth it? She could never be his, even if he did turn away now. But that accomplished

little. She was dead the second someone decided to pay for her execution. If he didn't do it, someone else would. And he would be left with a ruined reputation. But he would miss her. So would his daughter. And what of Ladara? What would he do if not this? How would he support her? It was all he knew, all he ever wanted.

He struggled for what seemed like minutes, but what was actually only seconds.

His mind was made up.

With a new determination, he steadied his aim and fired.

* * *

Einan fought back a tear as held his daughter's hand, a little tighter than normal, on the walk home. Her hair was still wet from the swim, and she chatted the whole way about the lake, about market, about wanting another of Joenne's wonderful biscuits. He barely heard her. His mind was plagued with the vision of Joenne, dead on the lakeshore, a long shaft piercing her neck.

Who could have done this? Who wanted her dead? He would find out. It might take years, but he would determine who had paid to kill the woman he loved. And he would kill the one responsible. For the first time, he would kill someone for free.

THE END

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Continued from page 29

his head, he gave Thealos a hard look. "The girl from Sol. Why?"

Thealos felt a bite of panic inside his chest. His mouth went dry. "Ah, you're still looking for Tica, aren't you?" It was a guess, but it felt right. This was the man she had fallen in love with. *By all the gods…*

Tysrke's eyes were cold and angry. "It's an easy enough question, lad. And you'd banned well better answer it. I've dealt with the Shae before. Evading comments won't work with me."

"I wasn't intending to evade you, sir," Thealos apologized. His mind worked furiously. "We brought her with us to protect her from your brother." He did his best to keep his face calm and untroubled. He knew he was at the disadvantage, just as he was when Nordain had summoned him before the Council Elders. This time, he would guard his tongue. For although Nordain might want Thealos in prison, this man would probably not flinch to see him dead. "Did you send your…brother to the Foxtale to bring her to you or to hang the knight? Or both?"

"Fury, no!" Tsyrke barked, his brown eyes sharp and glaring. "I arrived in Sol just after you left. Secrist was acting on his own, as he usually does. I haven't seen him in weeks."

Thealos steadied himself. He was trying to piece it all together. He remembered from the Foxtale that Ticastasy had known Secrist. Or known about him. She had told him once that she was waiting for someone – someone who was special to her. He had given her a pendant that she had worn after leaving Sol. Thealos felt his heart clench. He doubted she knew who he really was. Not this man. Not a Bandit leader.

"You arrived just after we left then?" Thealos asked. "What a deplorable sense of timing then. She told me she was waiting for…someone. But he never came. I'm assuming now that she meant you."

"Oh, I came," the Bandit snapped. "Only to hear that she'd run off with a Sleepwalker, her Drugaen friend, and a pampered whelp from Avisahn. You – I'm assuming." He faced Thealos. "She wasn't in any danger from the Kiran Thall and she knew it. Why did she go with you?"

Thealos shook his head. "You expect me to understand how a woman thinks? My people are noted for our wisdom, but not even we have solved that riddle. Let me clarify something. We didn't *take* her from Sol. She chose to come with us. I believe she doubted that you were coming back. When have sailors or Shae barters been men of their word? She doesn't know the truth about you, does she?"

The Bandit glared at him. "And how much do you think you really know?"

Thealos gave the Bandit a level look. "It might surprise you how much I know. I know that the Bandit Rebellion is massing down here in the Shoreland. I know that you are using Shae magic for purposes that are clearly Forbidden. Digging up the Everoot and hoarding it is not how it is supposed to be used."

"Spare us your speech on morality," the Sorian interrupted. "Tell me, how do the Shae feel about murdering their own kind? Some of us know about the Kinslayer wars. About Ravindranath."

Thealos ignored the deliberate insult. If Tsyrke were not tainted with Forbidden magic, there might be a chance to reason with him. "Consider this, Tsyrke. If I am here and I know about the Everoot, then doesn't it stand to reason that so does Avisahn? I know what the Everoot can do and what it has done in the past." He gave the Sorian a hard look. "At least there were survivors of Ravindranath. More than Sol-don-Orai."

"But if the whole banned Shae kingdom knew about this," Tsyrke said, "then why are *you* here and not the Wolfsmen? Were you sent to negotiate a Pax?"

Thealos rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. "Why indeed?"

"You are here because there is a Silvan artifact locked behind a Shae warding," the Sorian

answered. Thealos felt a tickle of magic in the air and the brief smell of smoke. "Your Warder companion was not strong enough to cross it. What makes you think you can?"

Thealos looked at the Sorian with distrust. "I am not the only one who can cross it," he replied. "There will be others. The Shae will not sit back in Avisahn while you destroy the land with Forbidden magic."

Tsyrke stepped forward. "And what happens if you get this artifact, Shae?"

"The Rebellion will end."

Tsyrke seemed to consider his words carefully. "How?"

"If I told you that, there would be no need to keep me alive. Would there?"

"Your death is hardly of any consequence to me."

Thealos shrugged meaningfully. He was gambling with his life, just as he had with Tannon's band. It took every bit of composure he possessed to keep his knees from trembling. "Of no consequence, you think? But you know how the Shae are," he said. "If I die here, they will send in the Shae legions. Of no consequence? Are you ready to engage the Shae army, commander? Kiran Phollen could not stand against them. Are you ready for the Crimson Wolfsmen in the city? You do know what a *Ravinjon* is?"

The Bandit commander looked at him coldly. "Maybe I'm counting on that."

* * *

The old man had let her bring her knapsack and cloak. As they left the *Wee Kirke* together that night, it felt to Ticastasy as if none of the patrons could even see them. She didn't trust herself to speak. But she'd managed to give her initial warning to Blain earlier that day. She'd done the best she could. For in her mind, Ticastasy knew that the old man was bringing her to Tsyrke. And she wasn't ready to face him. Not like this. They crossed the fog-shrouded city in silence and reached the governor's mansion before midnight. The manor guards never saw them.

"You're not going in?" Ticastasy asked as they stood before a large door in the south wing. She shivered just being in his presence and especially as his green eyes studied her. He smelled like cinders and clove smoke. He reminded her of a Sleepwalker.

"He will speak with you alone."

The enormous door opened smoothly on its gold and iron hinges. It was well oiled. She paused on the threshold and then entered. The smell of honeyed mead and tray wafers greeted her in the entryway. Mead – an unusual drink. She only knew one man who truly craved it. A single lamp burned on a polished wooden table across the room. Various rugs and tapestries hung from the wall and there was even a tall wooden dressing screen in one corner near a wardrobe.

Her eyes were still adjusting to the shadows before she smelled him.

"Tsyrke," she whispered as the door shut gently behind her.

"Sparrow."

The way he said it sent chills down her arms. He was a full head taller than she. In fact, she barely measured up to his shoulders. His hair was shorter than she remembered, freshly cut. The scent of the sea greeted her. He always smelled like seawater and mead. She shook her head, still not believing her eyes. In one corner of her heart, she longed to rush and hug him. In another corner, she wanted to reach for her knife.

"What in Hate's name are you doing here?" she whispered.

He gave her a crooked smile and drank deeply from a goblet. "I could ask you the same question. Landmoor is an odd place for a reunion. But there is something else I want to know even

more." He eyed her seriously. "Why didn't you wait for me in Sol?"

She bit her lip and folded her arms, aware of how disheveled she looked. Her shirt was torn, her hair tangled. She was exhausted physically and emotionally. And this – meeting him in Landmoor was a kick in the ribs. Anger came easily.

"When sailors start keeping their promises, I'll have grown old," she replied evenly, walking in closer. She was intimidated by his size, but that only made her more resolved to stand up to him. Her fear glazed over with the sparks of anger. He had lied to her. He had said he was a wealthy seafarer, not a banned Bandit general!

"Do you still have the pendant I gave you?"

She stared at him.

"You still have it…don't you."

She nodded. Why was he doing this? The pendant was a promise based on deception. She wanted to cry, but she knew that she alone had the opportunity to rescue her friends.

Tsyrke set down the goblet and walked over to the table. He looked at her torn clothes and winced. "Did any of my men hurt you?"

Again, she bit her lip, cutting off the urge to curse at him. He seemed to be expecting it. No, she needed to poke at his guilt instead. She replied softly, "Not as much as you did."

He slammed his fist on the table. The look he gave her was full of anger and anguish. "Bloody Hate, I came for you, Sparrow! I landed in Sol after you had already gone!" He breathed out deeply and relaxed his hand, controlling his temper. She could see his eyes twitching towards the goblet of mead. He wanted it badly. "I came for you only to learn you had run off with a Shaden and a Sleepwalker."

She took another step closer, seizing the opportunity. "Quickfellow's here?"

He smirked. "A princely name isn't it."

"Ban it, stop using me!" she said. "You used me for companionship in Sol, and now you're using me here. Quickfellow is my friend and I'm worried about him." She already knew that Sturnin was locked down below. Where were the others?

"He took you away from me," Tsyrke pointed out bitterly. "He's your friend? That's a rich slice. When did the Shae start keeping their word?"

She shook her head. "No, Tsyrke. No, don't blame him for your grandfather's death. Kiran Phollen brought trouble to himself. You told me that you had a brother in the Rebellion. You told me about Secrist – that he would never hurt me." She laughed and covered her cheek. "He hit me in the mouth. He knew who I was and he hit me. His men destroyed the Foxtale. If you truly did come, then you saw the ruin he caused. The Shaden…" She stopped, calming herself. "Quickfellow took me with him to Castun to protect me from them. But I still trusted you. I still believed what you had told me." She shook her head in amazement. "You lied to me. You said you were a ship captain. You had money and contacts. You said you cared for me. I warned you never to lie to me, Tsyrke. If I can't trust you, I can't be with you. I said that. I meant it."

He gave her a hard look. He wrestled to control his emotions. The look on his face was haunted with some twisted irony she could not see as he took a step closer to her. His voice was husky and raw. "And what was I supposed to do, Sparrow? Tell you I was going to betray Ballinaire to the king and end this war? Tell a bloody serving girl in Sol? Do you know how ridiculous that sounds? The risk?" His frown was hard, intense – honest. "The promises I made you…I meant every one of them. I still mean them. I'm bone weary of this army. I'm bone weary of this Rebellion." His voice was so soft she barely heard it. "You are right. My grandfather wasted his life fighting Dos-Aralon and when the Shae joined in, it finished him. He wasted his whole life over his ambitions." He

paused and studied her. "I'm not going to do that. I was the one who called for the knights. I was the one he was supposed to meet in Sol, not my brother." His look softened. He shook his head as if suddenly aware of how close he was standing to her. "Sweet Achrolese, I feel bad enough. Look at you. Let me fetch you some fresh clothes. You look bone weary as well. Are you hungry?"

She wanted so much to believe him. That the dream he had taught her might actually happen. But she could not trust him. Not without proof. And not before rescuing the others. She held up her hand. "You could be lying again."

"Why?" he asked. "I've just risked my life telling you the truth. The whole of it. I couldn't share this with you in Sol. I have to now."

She stared at him and swallowed. "Are Quickfellow and the others alive?"

He nodded and raised the goblet to his lips. "I haven't decided what to do with Prince Quickfellow yet, though." He chuckled darkly. "You know he's lied to you as well?"

"What do you mean?"

"He handles himself very well, doesn't he? Who do you suspect he is?" Tsyrke asked, his face cruel. "A Silvan prince? The son of a Sunedrion councilman?"

"He's a Shae," she answered. "And more honorable than most."

"Oh, he's a Shae, Sparrow. As glib as they come. And as common as they come. He's only the son of a barter."

Ticastasy stared at him. A spasm of pain and betrayal went through her. "I don't believe you."

"We had a nice little discussion about him earlier today. He's been banished from Avisahn. The Wolfsmen who caught up with him in the Foxtale were going to arrest him for treason. None of this is sounding familiar to you? I imagine not. I don't think he would have told you this about himself."

She had no idea whether Tsyrke was lying to her or not. He had lied to her before, despite his excuses, but he seemed to have strong details. He knew about the Shae who had come to the Foxtale. Was it all an elaborate ruse? Angry but uncertain, she decided that before she would condemn Quickfellow, she would hear it from his own lips first. Maybe she'd wanted to believe it too much. Maybe she'd fooled herself twice. *Ban you, Quickfellow, if you've lied to me too…*

"You swear it, Tsyrke?"

"He's in the dungeon below the mansion," Tsyrke replied, motioning towards the door. She gave him a wary look. "Hate, if you want to see him breathing, I'll let you!" he snapped. "I told you my reasons, Sparrow. I told you the truth about why I'm here. I want this Rebellion to end."

She gave him a skeptical look. "Yet this is your army. You hardly look like you're quitting."

"I can't exactly manage that with Ballinaire rustling in the woods. One of the other generals has been watching my movements. I've had to be very careful. But consider this. I am in the governor's manor in Landmoor. He knows and stands to profit greatly from this. I told you that I sent word to the knights to meet me in Sol. And I see you brought one with you." She bowed her head and nodded. "I haven't met with him yet, but I will and then you'll see. I plan to let him go back to Owen Draw. I don't want his blood on my hands. But what about Quickfellow? Do you know what he is after?"

She gave him a wry, sad smile. "You said it yourself, Tsyrke. I'm just a serving girl from Sol. No one tells me anything."

Tsyrke didn't seem surprised. "I didn't think he did. Well, I doubt he'd tell you the truth of it anyway. You want to see him then? At least let me get you some fresh clothes. Do you need a healer? I can fetch a Zerite. There are a few here in the city."

She glanced over at the changing screen and saw Tsyrke's two-handed sword hanging from

one of the posts along with some of his clothes. An idea sprouted in her mind. "I have something here," she said, twisting the travel sack from her shoulders. "Can I…?" She nodded to the changing screen.

Tsyrke nodded deftly and walked around the table, easing himself into the big chair. Ticastasy hurried behind the changing screen and quickly untied her sack. She removed the gown Quickfellow had given her and unraveled the bundle.

"I swear that I'm going to kill Secrist when I see him," Tsyrke chuckled blackly. She heard him fill the goblet of mead. "This is all really his fault, isn't it? Ban it all, he's never been early in his life…"

Unfastening the lacings, she smoothed out the gown and then hung it from a peg. Tugging off her shirt, she slipped into the gown quickly, feeling gooseflesh prickle up her arms. "You know your brother," she sighed, trying to quell the nervousness in her stomach. "He's a mule in need of a good whipping. Make sure he feels it." She pulled off her boots so she could get the pants off quickly. There was a mirror on the inside wall and she studied herself, swiping at stray tufts of her billowy brown hair. She tugged on her boots again and straightened the gown. Reaching behind her, she did up the lacings as quickly as she could.

"I've missed you, Sparrow," he said. "It was a long winter. Too long. The seas were wretched – straight from Pitan. But I bought the homestead I told you about. It's mine."

Ticastasy looked at herself. Then reaching into the travel sack again, she withdrew the sparrow pendant he had given her in Sol and fastened it around her neck. She quickly slid on her bracelets and earrings from a small velvet jewel pouch. Her shoulder throbbed, but she ignored the pain.

"What are you doing?" he demanded, rising from the chair.

"I'm almost done," she said, stalling him. She furrowed through the pile of clothes left on top of a chest near the wardrobe. It was mostly comprised of his armor, settled nicely on the tattered red cloak. A relic from his grandfather, he had said. She fingered the fabric while slipping one of his daggers in her boot. Where were those keys?

There was a loud rap on the door and she froze. Tsyrke muttered something under his breath. "Enter!" he snapped.

The oak door opened and Ticastasy saw a Bandit officer between the slits in the screen. "Lord Ballinaire is on his way to see you, Commander."

"Doesn't the old man ever sleep?" Tsyrke said. "Where is he?"

"He's in the tunnels, sir. Will be here soon. I thought I'd warn you." The soldier sounded worried.

"I'll deal with him, Trent. Go find Mage and tell him to meet me here."

"I will, sir."

Ticastasy stepped away from the screen as the soldier left the room. She watched Tsyrke's expression change as he looked at her. It was hard to keep a smile from her face, but his look was flattering.

"Sweet Achrolese," he murmured, "but you are fair."

She approached him and looked up into his eyes. "I'm glad you like it," she said, enjoying the expression on his face. She fingered the pendant. "There have been changes, Tsyrke. Surely you realize that. I…I need time, to see how I feel about you, about what you are doing here. I'm not your prisoner, am I?"

"Hate, no!" he sputtered, folding his arms.

"I'll see Quickfellow then. If that's all right. I don't want to be here when the leader of the Bandit Rebellion comes in to talk to you," she said. "Sweet Achrolese, I wouldn't know what to do.

Pretend I'm your serving wench? But I do want to talk to you. After he leaves?" She gave him one of her most promising smiles.

Tsyrke thought about it, trying to seem reluctant. She read right through it and arched her eyebrows. "Let me stop by the kitchen and make sure he's eaten. Please, Tsyrke. He's my friend, a barter or a prince. I'd fetch you a bowl of stew if you were rotting in the River Cellars in Sol."

A smile finally broke on his stormy face. "I've missed you, Sparrow. I've missed you more than I can say." He turned around and raised the goblet. "We'll talk later. We have a lot to talk about. Fetch the Shae lad some buttered rolls. Tell him to get some sleep. He'll live through the night – because of you. Tell him that."

Ticastasy gave him a warm smile. The small iron key pinched in the bottom of her boot.

XXXI

Heavy iron manacles clamped against Thealos' wrists and ankles, making his fingers and toes tingle with the lack of blood. The manacles were connected to a short length of chain fixed to an iron ring hammered into the stone wall. He rested the weight on his lap and tried to find a comfortable position on the floor. Clumps of dry straw littered the cell, and he scooted some over with his boot to see if it might cushion him a little. But the straw stank of urine, and he kicked it away, scowling.

Thealos sat in the main holding cell at the head of the hall. He could hear other prisoners in cells further down, locked behind huge iron doors. The door on his cell was made of long iron bars, fastened together at the top and bottom with steel slats. The hinges were rusty and made a grating screech when the soldiers had opened the door. Torchfire sputtered outside in the corridor, and without any windows he was unable to tell whether it was noon or dusk. Twice since he had been locked up, the Bandits had brought in other people, chained them to the wall near him, and then returned later to take them to another cell. He was alone at the moment, but he could hear the others. Some muttered and grumbled. One man, far down the hall, hadn't stopped whimpering since Thealos arrived.

Sitting in the shadows of the holding cell, Thealos thought about his encounter with Tsyrke Phollen. He remembered it over and over, wondering what else he could have said. He wasn't sure whether they intended to kill him or not. Fear bloomed inside him again and he loathed the feeling. He was weary of his fears and shoved it down inside himself. He was alive at the moment. If they had wanted him dead right away, there was nothing to stop it. He visited the conversation again in his mind. Tsyrke's words had been plainly spoken: *Maybe I'm counting on that*. Had he meant it only as a threat? That they intended to kill him in order to lure the Shae down into the Shoreland? Or was it something to cow him and make him more willing to bend and tell them what they wanted to know? Thealos shook his head in the darkness. They knew about the Crystal. Well, they didn't know what it was, but they knew *something* was there. A wry smile crossed his mouth. He was hoping that they would send him in after it. Did they know that the Otsquare prevented any human from passing into the chamber? They would not be able to follow him in. Better still, if he could only manage to slip out of the cell, he knew he would be safe within the warding. But how? How was he going to get that far?

Thealos' stomach grumbled with hunger. How long had it been since he'd eaten? He remembered the savory food at the Catpaw and wished he had finished eating all of the stew in the trencher bowl. He was fearful – who wouldn't be in his place? – but he'd manage to skirt trouble all the way from Avisahn. Granted, having Jaerod as a protector did have something to do with that.

A roach roamed across the floor in front of him and he crushed it under the heel of his boot. He missed Jaerod. He thought back on the flash of lightning coming from a clear night sky. No rain, no storm. Just a single streak of crackling white. He hoped against hope that the Sleepwalker had somehow survived, even though he no longer felt that prick of awareness, that second sense whenever he was nearby. If anyone could face a Sorian and make it through alive, Jaerod could. He wished he knew for certain whether Jaerod had.

The door at the end of the hall opened and the sound of marching steps came down the corridor. Another prisoner? Thealos could hear the clinking of chains. He didn't have any idea how long he'd been locked away. Was it morning yet? Had the Bandit army reached the walls of the city?

A group of guards shoved Sturnin Goff down the way.

Thealos nearly blurted out the knight's name, but he caught himself. He sat up quickly, coming into the light so the knight could see him.

Sturnin Goff noticed him, but he also kept silent. He wiped his nose on the back of his hand, but not before making a quick gesture to Thealos not to say a word. The guard stopped and stared into the holding cell.

Thealos kept his expression blank and his eyes fixed on the guards, not Sturnin.

The guardsman hesitated a moment and then withdrew a ring of keys and unlocked the door leading to the holding cell. Four of them muscled the knight inside and locked him to a ring on the other wall. Brushing off their hands, they left, locking the door once again. Howls for food started up as soon as the soldiers continued down the hall.

"Well, you are the last man I expected to find down here," Thealos whispered in amazement after the soldiers had left.

Sturnin settled down on the floor with a slump. "I didn't banned expect to find you here either," he answered. "When were you caught?"

"That depends," Thealos replied. "I don't know whether it's day or night. I've been in the tunnels since the morning after we lost you."

The knight nodded. "That would have been this morning. Sunset was an hour ago."

Thealos looked at him seriously. "Where are the others?"

Sturnin sighed. "Faring better than we are, I hope. Allavin and the Drugaen went looking for you two. Where's the other Shae?"

"They took him to another cell." He nodded vaguely down the hall. "I think he's alive, though. And Tica?"

"They've probably got her by now too. When we came to the gates, I sent her ahead to an inn Allavin told us about. They'll probably have some Kiran Thall in disguise waiting to drag in anyone else who comes along." He shook his head angrily. "Banned foolish of me. Banned foolish."

"It's probably too late to point out that the Bandits control the city, isn't it?" Thealos said with an ironic edge to his voice. The knight nodded, festering with anger. "Don't worry yourself, Sturnin Goff. There is no way you could have known."

The knight gave him a black look. "I am only one man. I just take heart knowing that the Governor of Landmoor will die when this is over. That he could betray the king like this…" He shook his head. "Well, justice will come due. And it will ride with hooves of thunder."

Thealos cocked his head. "I didn't know the knights were poets. What in Pitan makes you think that justice is coming?"

The knight regarded him and a cool smile lit his face. "I sent a message from Castun. A woodcutter agreed to carry it to Owen Draw for me. I paid him well enough to get the job done and promised him more if he could get it there in three days."

"And will they answer it?"

Sturnin nodded assuredly. "I sent it to the Knight General of Owen Draw. He *should* be the banned Champion of Owen Draw. Maybe he will get the title once Ballinaire is under the shovel."

Thealos scooted back against the wall, letting his chains rest on his lap again. "And why won't there be a Champion until Ballinaire is dead?"

"Ballinaire was the last," the knight replied. "He destroyed a tradition of honor that had been with the knights of Owen Draw since we were established. You know we trace our origins to the Shae, don't you?"

Thealos shook his head. "No, I didn't."

The knight leaned forward. "We do, Thealos. We patterned our order after the Crimson Wolfsmen. They were dedicated to protecting the Shae people and to defending the life of your king and his family. The knights of Owen Draw are the protectors of the kingdom and the life of don Rion and his family. It is our single duty. Our honor. In the past, there was one knight chosen as Champion of the realm. The one who had perfected his skills, the one who every other knight deferred to. He had power to lead the king's army on his behalf, to stand in his place should the need arise. The next most powerful man in the realm, except maybe the heir to the throne."

"Ballinaire," Thealos said with a nod, remembering a little of Dos-Aralon's history. "I knew he was originally a knight from Owen Draw – and that he did not lack for wealth or power. He fought during the Purge Wars, if I remember right."

Sturnin Goff nodded savagely. "He won great honor for his courage. He was young back then, but already a great leader. No one ever questioned his loyalty. He was popular among the people and even won the respect of the Shae battle commanders. He was one of the few who defined the Accords of Dos-Aralon, giving the knights of Owen Draw power to command any garrison in the realm."

"I did not know he had done that," Thealos said, impressed. "So Ballinaire became Champion of Owen Draw after the Purge Wars. But when he rebelled against don Rion, it probably cast doubts on you all. It is easier to believe the evil in men than the good."

"In no small way," Sturnin Goff added with contempt. "There were many knights who remained loyal to the man and rebelled with him. It shouldn't have lasted this long. The rebellion should have guttered out the moment he forsook his honor. For if a man would betray his king how could you ever trust him again?"

"Didn't he rebel because he was not named the Duke of Owen Draw?"

Sturnin Goff nodded. "A right petty grievance, if you ask me. I guess it shows how far and deep hate and pride can go together."

Thealos listened as Sturnin told him about the knights and their order. He had always wondered why the man was so aloof and distant, so unemotional about living and dying. He'd never thought to compare him to the Crimson Wolfsmen and their single-minded determination to protect the Shae. To the end, Sturnin Goff was a soldier who lived and breathed a life of trouble. His parents had both been killed during a Kiran Thall raid in Owen Draw. At first he wanted to be a knight to avenge them. But as he trained and studied the arts of war, he discovered that his pain was not the only pain in the valley. Many others had lost their homes, their families, even their lives because of the lightning attacks of the Bandit Rebellion. The Rebellion wasn't strong enough to topple don Rion's government. But it was too prideful to admit that, to try and soothe the wounds between an embittered Ballinaire and his king. Too many had died for there to be any forgiveness.

Thealos smiled fondly at Sturnin Goff. He was not a man with flowery words or fragile sentiments. Though hardened by years of war and training, he was still a man who wanted nothing more

than the Rebellion to end so that peace could return and ease the suffering done to hundreds of shattered families. His duty would not allow him to quit until that end was accomplished. He knew many knights who had been killed by the Kiran Thall or trapped and outnumbered by companies of Bandit soldiers in the Kingshadow. In their memory, he continued to fight.

The door at the head of the corridor opened, bringing smells wafting down from the kitchens. It was enough to drive Thealos mad with hunger. He glanced at the knight and shook his head. "That smells like a roast hog and cider, doesn't it? They built this place near the kitchens to torture us. I'd rather face the rack about now."

"You're right. Smells like roast with onions and sage," Sturnin agreed with a wan smile. "The Governor is supping well tonight. I'll remember that when I hang him," he added as the clamoring within the other cells rose up around them.

"They haven't fed me all day," Thealos said. "Maybe it's time now."

Sturnin shrugged. "You think you'll get the governor's scraps, do you? Don't let it bother you, lad. You get used to hunger in the saddle."

"Don't talk about horses, you're only making me more hungry," Thealos quipped, cocking his head, hearing the sound of bootsteps approach. One guard followed by someone with low-heeled boots. It was a soft step, almost a…woman's?

Thealos nudged closer to the door as a guard approached and unlocked it. He tugged it open with a grating squeal, and Thealos gaped with surprise as Ticastasy walked in bearing a tray loaded with food.

She wore the gown he had given her. For a moment, he was paralyzed. He could see her clearly in his mind's eye serving tables at that tavern in Sol. The image clashed with a dank cell full of roaches and stinking straw. He blinked, trying to be sure it was her and that his eyes weren't deceiving him.

"I've always thought it strange how your eyes glow like that," she said with the twist of a smile, bringing the tray over and dropping down in a crouch. She glanced back at the guard in annoyance, and he fumed and walked away, grumbling at her to shut the door when she finished feeding them.

"Let's see, we have some spice stew here in a loaf trencher, some buttered wafers and apricot halves." She glanced over at the knight. "Hello, Sturnin."

"Hello, lass," he said, studying her. "How did you end up serving tables down here?"

"Eat up," she insisted, grabbing a wafer and tossing it to the knight. He caught it and started chewing. "I made sure the stew wasn't scorched before dipping in the ladle, and let's see – I even brought some Silvan wine because ale and mead are also both Forbidden. I can't understand why that's true, but then I've never pretended to know everything about the Shae."

"What are you doing here?" Thealos demanded, sensing that something was wrong. Her bantering was forced, uneasy.

"Saving you both, it would appear," she whispered, smiling with satisfaction at his bulging eyes. "Quickly, eat! That guard won't wander down the hall for very long and I've knocked out plenty for one day. Here, have some fruit." She tossed Sturnin an apricot.

Thealos tore a hunk from the loaf and dabbed it in the stew. It was steaming hot, but he ate it ravenously. The meat was a little tough, but he wasn't about to quibble over how rare it was supposed to be. He took a long sip from the wine cup, soothing his parched throat. It was an excellent vintage, probably from the governor's wine cellars. She bent close to him and stared into his eyes. He felt his stomach shrivel.

"How is your wine?" she asked coolly.

He set the goblet down, wiping his mouth. "Why are you looking at me that way?"

"Because I need to ask you something. And I want the truth. You can always tell if a man is lying – it's always in his eyes. Is that why your eyes glow, then? I've wondered that a long while about the Shae."

He stared back at her. "I don't understand." He swallowed, feeling her presence so uncomfortably close. She shifted nearer, her face so close he could feel her breath on his cheek. It was as if they were lounging on a cushioned window seat, not a filthy cellar floor.

"Are you the son of a barter?" she asked.

A shaft of guilt went into his stomach. He closed his eyes, feeling the irony slap him behind the guilt. He knew there was no point denying anything. She wouldn't have asked if she didn't already know.

"Yes," Thealos replied, not daring to open his eyes.

She was quiet for several moments, but he could feel her breathing, feel her stiffen. He opened his eyes. It didn't matter how guilty he felt. This was the only chance he had to escape. He had to convince her to help him.

"I don't need to ask how you found out," Thealos said, staring into her face. "You've seen him, haven't you?"

She nodded curtly. "Don't change the subject, Quickfellow. Is that really your name, then?"

Thealos nodded. "I should have clarified this earlier. Let me try to explain it quickly. Many, many years ago," he said, feeling suddenly exhausted, "my father's family were heirs to the Quicksilver throne. This was back when the Shae lived over in the East Kingdoms. There was a revolt and a civil war over the succession of the throne. My Correl's family chose to follow a Silvan prince to this land and renounced their rights of inheritance. In another land, I might be considered a Silvan Prince. But not here, not in this place."

"You let me believe a lie, Quickfellow," she said coldly. "What else have you led me to believe?"

He frowned, feeling his frustration strain against the tethers of his self-control. "Do you think I came here to buy wine?" he demanded, leaning forward. "There is an army beyond the city. You've seen it. You've also seen the Everoot and you heard what was done with it by your forefathers."

"Yes, but how do I know you aren't hear to buy the Everoot, barter? Think for a moment, Quickfellow! Why else would you be here?"

He gripped her arm. "Because although I am the son of a barter," he said in a low voice, "My birthright gives me access to another magic that is down here, in the tunnels. I do not know why that is. I don't care. But the magic is real and it will stop this madness from continuing any further. It will stop the Rebellion. Think of all who will die if we don't get the Crystal. Think of all we stand to lose if Tsyrke and his fellows win. Remember the Kiran Thall in Sol? Remember how they behaved? Think what will happen to the valley if they win!"

She frowned, obviously angry and disturbed by what he had told her. "Then the Crystal *is* real?"

"You said you could tell if a man was lying. I have told you the truth. I swear it."

She was quiet for several moments. "I believe you. Maybe I'm the world's greatest fool for trusting a Shae, but I pray that I'm not." Ticastasy hiked up her skirt and tugged off the leather boot. A small key ring plopped into her hand. She gave him a wink.

"Quit flirting lass and unlock us!" Sturnin grumbled.

She gave the knight a smile. "I came here to free you, Sturnin. I just needed to know whether I should let Quickfellow out too."

She started searching for the right key to unlock the manacles on Thealos' ankles. It took several tries until a key made a little snick in the lock and the manacles opened. Blood tingled in his feet and he smiled with relief.

"Thank you," he said, tipping her chin so that their eyes met. "We'll see you safely through this, I promise you."

She grabbed the chain between his wrists. "Here, hold still, Quickfellow. This won't take…"

The door opened at the far end of the hall and the marching sound of boots thundered into the dungeon. Tica's eyes widened with shock as the clank of sword and armor rattled the stillness.

"In the shadows, lass," Sturnin warned. The serving girl stole deeper into the cell, hiding herself in the darkness. Sturnin leaned forward, blocking sight of her. Thealos took another hunk of bread and quickly chewed it, watching to see who was going towards the kitchens and the stairwell leading out of the dungeon. The advance guard wore black armor fringed with gold. They carried long-handled torches before them, showing the rats slinking in the ceiling rafters. The man in the middle looked about seventy years old, his face hard-edged and angry. His hair was long and gray, spotted with streaks of ice. His gait was strong and sturdy, his walk quick. He stunk of Forbidden magic.

"Ballinaire," Sturnin spat in a near-whisper.

Thealos bristled as the soldiers passed, obviously on their way to meet with the commander of the Shoreland regiment. The clanking noises faded as they mounted the steps. The door leading to the kitchens slammed shut behind them.

"That should give us even more time," Ticastasy said, slipping in front of Thealos once again. She swiped some of her dark hair behind her ear. "I knew he was coming – hoped to get down here without having to cross him. Ballinaire is here to speak with Tsyrke. You've met him, haven't you?" Her eyes met his and then looked away.

"I know who he is now," Thealos said, squeezing her hand. "And I know that you didn't. I'm sorry."

She bit her lip and then slid the key into the manacles on his wrists. "It gets pretty complicated after that, as you can imagine."

Thealos nodded, feeling a surge of relief when the heavy iron fell onto his lap. He scooped up the chain and set it next to him on the straw. The feelings of relief surged within him. Without her, he would never have made it safely out. He owed her more than a tavern. He owed her his life.

Her eyes found his again.

"You wore that in Sol," he said, nodding to the pendant around her neck. His touch grazed her skin. "You wore this as a promise, didn't you?"

She sighed and nodded.

Thealos shook his head slowly and tugged the pendant, snapping the thin chain. He tossed it into the straw "You don't belong to him, Stasy. Not him."

She brushed her hair back again. "I don't belong to you either."

"Quit staring at each other like smitten fools and unlock me!" Sturnin hissed.

Thealos didn't know why he did it. He couldn't stop himself. Leaning forward, he kissed her.

It surprised them both.

"Thank you," he said. "For saving my life."

A shadow blocked the doorway of the cell and she flinched, shoving away from him in a panic.

Secrist Phollen stood there, gripping a dagger.

XXXII

The reek of Forbidden magic stung Thealos' nose, bringing tears to his eyes. It seethed from the dagger. He should have noticed it approaching the cell, but the scent of Ballinaire passing through the tunnels still lingered in the air. Secrist's eyes locked on his, his mouth tightening into a snarl.

Ticastasy wiped her mouth, watching Secrist with naked fear on her face. He didn't even look at her. He stared at Thealos.

"Shaden," he spat, swinging the cell door open with a rusty groan. There was an intensity in his eyes that was unnatural, a self-feeding hate that drained the color from his cheeks. The stench of Forbidden magic entered the cell even more strongly. Thealos looked at the grainy textured knife blade. His skin shivered.

Ticastasy regained some of her composure and reached under her skirt, producing a dagger from her other boot.

"No," Thealos warned, holding up his hand to stop her. He backed away from the wall and watched as Secrist followed his movements. Fear threatened to overcome him, but he swallowed it down. One touch from the blade – one slice in the skin and he would die. He knew what it was, even though he'd never seen Deathbane before. He wished he were a Sleepwalker. But he wasn't, and wishing for it wouldn't change anything. He retreated several steps back into the cell, grabbing Ticastasy by the arm and pulling her behind him. He didn't want her getting in the way.

"Stay behind me," he warned, nudging her back towards Sturnin.

"Take this," she said, trying to give him the dagger.

Secrist lunged.

Thealos nearly screamed as the Kiran Thall slashed at him with the dagger. Ticastasy gasped, but Thealos managed to grab the Kiran Thall's forearm with both hands. Some flicker of thought went through his mind, faster than his own reflexes. Even though he was separated from the blade of Jade-Shayler, he felt a remnant of the magic still inside him. A Crimson Wolfsman's training – just enough to save his life. They both went down, arms and legs thrashing as Secrist jerked and heaved to break free of Thealos' grip. Twisting, Thealos tried to throw the man off of him, but he was too heavy.

Suddenly, Secrist arched in pain as Ticastasy drove her dagger into his back. Thealos saw a mess of chewed roots in Secrist's mouth, its juice dribbling down his chin. With his other hand, he reached back and pulled the dagger from his back.

"You bloody whore!" he roared, his body convulsing. Thealos watched his eyes glaze over in

ecstasy. He was chewing Everoot. Thealos inhaled the honey-sweet smell from his mouth. He was thick with it. The Everoot was part of him now, a craving he couldn't quit. Thealos recognized it at once and knew that the magic had overwhelmed him.

Secrist's eyes went wild. Staring at the bloodied dagger in his hand, he looked down at Thealos. Then drove it down towards Thealos' throat.

Thealos bucked and shoved Secrist off of him. Ticastasy landed a kick to his ribs, but the soldier hardly grunted. Straightening, he pounced at Thealos again, both daggers whipping around. Thealos dove to the left, into the cell's cramped corner, trying to keep away from the attack. His mind whirled furiously. How long could he dodge Secrist's thrusts? He needed a weapon. He needed his Silvan sword, but the Sorian had destroyed it.

"I'll kill you!" Secrist swore, his voice slurred and thick. "I'll bloody kill you all!"

There was no reasoning with him. No logic to call on. Something was driving the Kiran Thall, pushing him to the fringes of reason and then a few steps further. The madness gave him strength, but it also clouded him. Thealos side-stepped to the right, not wanting to get trapped in the corner. If they could make it to the door and lock him in …

Thealos sidestepped the thrust and nearly went down. Secrist was still quick. Having missed the Shae with the dagger, he slammed his elbow into Thealos' throat. It hurt like fury, but Thealos grabbed the man's arm and shoved him back, trying to win more space between them.

Sturnin heaved Secrist off his feet, his arms twisting one of the iron chains around the Kiran Thall's throat.

As the knight and the soldier whirled and wrestled, Ticastasy pulled Thealos to his feet. Her quick thinking had saved him again. The manacles no longer encumbered the knight, but he used the chains as a rope and slung it around Secrist's throat, slowly twisting it closed around his neck. The Kiran Thall jerked in spasms and cut wildly in the air. He still had Tica's dagger in his hand, and he struck the knight in the chest twice. Sturnin winced, but held his forearm over the chain, hoisting Secrist backwards, trying to snap his spine and choke him.

"Go!" Sturnin gasped as blood gushed from his side. He slammed the Kiran Thall into the wall a second time.

Indecision twisted inside of Thealos. He watched the knight struggle and then he saw the Deathbane dagger rise up and fall, stabbing Sturnin in the stomach. The knight let out a yell of pain – as if the scream had been ripped from his lungs. Thealos watched in horror as the knight twitched and convulsed as the flood of Forbidden magic swelled in eddies through the cell. Thealos saw Sturnin's life wink out like a snuffed candle. All his years of training, all the battles he had fought. Gone in the flicker of a moment. His skin started to shrivel and blacken.

"Sweet hate!" Ticastasy breathed in horror.

"Run," Thealos said, grabbing her arm.

He slammed the cell door shut behind them, hearing the lock click into place. But he knew somehow that the cell door would not hold Secrist long.

* * *

Tsyrke stared dispassionately at the aging Bandit leader. He didn't know how Ballinaire had survived so many years of war without his bones ending up snapped and broken, but here he was, with a stride full of stamina and vigor. *The man will bloody never die*, he thought.

Ballinaire held his white-plumed helmet in the crook of his arm. His face was hard aged skin, split by wrinkled crags. Even his eyebrows were flecked with gray. A thin white beard garnished

his lower jaw. Five gold general bars and a golden star were pinned to his cape along the shoulder. It was all about rank. All about authority and position. As if anyone in Owen Draw or Dos-Aralon remembered anymore about the good he had done early in his life. Tsyrke wanted to chuckle. All they would remember was his angry defiance and the countless lives lost. Blackened fields and ashes, all of it.

"You look like Pitan," Tsyrke said, offering Ballinaire some honeyed mead. "Do you want a drink?" As a true Shorelander himself, Tsyrke never took the Inland customs of deference to rank seriously.

"I did not come here to get drunk, *Commander*," Ballinaire said with a clip and rasp in his voice. "You'd better pray to the Druid god Achrolese that you didn't come here for that reason either. Are you sober?"

"Very," Tsyrke replied, setting the goblet down. Mage was sitting in a chair to one side, watching them both. "Though after I heard what happened last night…" He took another sip from his large cup.

"You should have been here sooner," Ballinaire said, pacing on the other side of the desk. His eyebrow twitched. "You should have been here weeks ago!"

Tsyrke held the glare and matched it with one of his own. "I came when I could," he replied. "It is no easy task keeping a regiment moving and fed, not staying any place long enough to get pinned down by the brags at Dos-Aralon. Hiding in the mountains is one thing, but roaming the Shoreland without getting caught is totally different. I got my troops into the Shadows Wood for you. But what about Dairron and Folkes? Are they moving?"

The Bandit leader stopped and lifted his chin peremptorily. "Why wouldn't they?"

"Are they moving?" Tsyrke repeated.

"Commander Folkes' regiment is nearly to the Dayspring Rush," Ballinaire replied with full confidence. "Soon yours will be reinforced. I think you are too generous with their ale, Commander. The men can hardly stand up straight."

"It isn't easy to stand straight with tide fever," he snapped. "Mage and I will join the army in the morning to make sure Miestri has left. Was she acting under your orders, my lord?"

"You all act under my orders," Ballinaire seethed. "Do not take that tone of voice with me, Commander Phollen. Your army is in lamentable disarray. No discipline. No order. They should be in Landmoor by now, not perched at the brink." He held up his finger to stop Tsyrke's retort. "I want to know what you have done to move our cause along. Where were you?"

Tsyrke leaned back in his chair. "I was at sea, my lord. Securing supplies for my regiment. I can't likely buy my grain from Iniva, or raid it like you do. We'll need to be ready to withstand a siege, and likely a very long one."

"No," Ballinaire said, cutting him short. "You need to be ready to march. To march on Dos-Aralon itself."

Tsyrke shook his head and chuckled. "March on Dos-Aralon?"

"There is nothing at all amusing about my orders, Commander. General Dairron is swinging his army down from the north. We need to start marching to arrive at the borders of Dos-Aralon when they have left to attack him. We must not fail General Dairron."

"Do you know if his army has left the Vale yet?" Tsyrke pressed.

"Miestri informs me that it has," he answered.

"Miestri," Tsyrke sneered. "Has she also told you that the Shae know about this? Do you think they'll stay in Avisahn while we attack Dos-Aralon?"

"You do not appreciate the power of the Everoot," Ballinaire answered. "I see that you do not.

It is no matter if the King of Dos-Aralon himself awaited us there with all the hosts of the Crown, for he *cannot* win. If the Shae send the Crimson Wolfsmen across the river, they send them to be slaughtered. I have *seen* what the Everoot does when it becomes like dust." He shook his head and fixed Commander Phollen with his finger. "If you lack full confidence in our cause, perhaps *you* shouldn't be leading one of my regiments."

Tsyrke glared at him, the grooves of his mouth frowning more. His blood ignited in his veins.

"I do not reward failure, Commander Phollen. You've forgotten your heritage. I fought against your grandfather during the Purge Wars. He was a vicious and a cunning general, and a skilled leader. That is why I desired you for my Rebellion. I hold you responsible for everything that has happened since the Sleepwalker shamed your troops in the Shadows Wood. I want no excuses, Commander. I *expect* you to exercise your full faculties on behalf of my army. If you do not, I *will* relieve you of command. Remember that, Commander!"

Tsyrke's hands tightened into fists as Lord Ballinaire swung around and left him alone with Mage.

Tsyrke waited for several long moments.

"You didn't tell him about the Shae we captured," Mage said.

"I did not," Tsyrke agreed. He rubbed his thumb on the rim of the goblet. He looked at Mage. "He's a little overconfident, isn't he? He's assuming Dairron left the Kingshadow."

"He hasn't. But Folkes is marching and the knights will collide with him if he doesn't turn back soon."

Tsyrke nodded confidently. "Just like we planned. Here – in Landmoor. The Rebellion ends *here*."

Mage nodded and rubbed his chin. "You did the right thing, letting the girl set them both free. Having the knight locked up with him was the most convenient way to do it."

"It was your idea," Tsyrke said with a sobered smile. "You planted the seeds in her mind."

"Yes, but seeds don't always sprout. She'll think it was her idea after all. And now we'll learn what the Shae have been hiding beneath the city all these years." The Sorian looked smug. "She must help him claim the magic and slip out tonight – before Ballinaire learns who he really is."

Tsyrke nodded. "Or Miestri."

* * *

The shock and warmth of the knight's death made him double over in ecstasy. The dagger. Oh, the dagger! The juice of the 'Root tingled inside his mouth, but that was salt compared to what the dagger made him taste. It was like licking tongues of copper fire. It sent swirls of feeling inside him. And pleasure! Oh, sweet pleasure! Secrist yanked the chain from around his throat. No bruises or even a gash. Whole and unharmed.

Invincible.

The Kiran Thall looked down at the dead knight. He was gone, a lifeless husk. His entire body had shriveled and blackened with the Deathbane's power. His memories and pain and triumphs were inside Secrist now. Harvested like grain for the winter. He felt the knight's skill and training whispering to him. The man's skin was already crumbling to dust. The feeling of power would not last long. Maybe a day. Maybe only hours. But for now, he was everything the knight was. The magic was locked inside him, ready to use. To kill again. To keep killing and to keep feeding the hunger. To kill the Shaden. To cut down the banned Shaden and drink his blood. It burned inside his mind, growing hotter and hotter. What would the Shaden's life taste like when he died?

Secrist didn't remember why he wanted to kill. Only that the need drove him. Like hunger or thirst. He went to the cage-like door of the cell. It had shut and locked. Secrist jabbed the dagger into the lock. The metal hissed and corroded, steaming as it burned away. The blade sliced through it as if it were freshly churned butter. Shoving the cell door open, he emerged into the hall. The whelp was not far away.

Hungrily, he started to run.

XXXIII

The sputter of torches lit the main hall of the tunnel in even increments, but further down emerged soldiers carrying their own. Gripping Tica's hand, Thealos pulled her into a side tunnel to hide. The Bandits were everywhere. He stopped in the darkness, waiting for the soldiers to pass and praying that he had seen them first. Sweat streaked down his face and his stomach clenched after the hard run. His legs trembled, out of fear – out of anger. He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to blot out the look of agony on Sturnin's face as he died.

"Quickfellow," Ticastasy whispered, and he clamped her mouth shut with his hand.

Four Bandit soldiers passed b,y and the light from their torches played in the grooves of the paving stones, just reaching the tip of Thealos' boot. He watched them pass, relieved, and then nodded.

"Is he…do you think he's still following us?" she panted. She wiped the hair away from her eyes.

"I don't know," Thealos said, breathing heavily. He was winded. "I thought we lost him at the junction, but he followed." Carefully, he went back to the main corridor and peered down. He watched the glare of the torches. The Bandits had stopped for something nearly fifty paces away. There was a grunt of warning and then cries of alarm. Secrist cut them down, his strange dagger glimmering with a greenish light in the distance. The four soldiers collapsed in a heap, their deathcries grating down Thealos' spine.

Ticastasy gripped his arm. "Come on," she begged.

Thealos nodded, and they slipped back into the main tunnel, heading away from Secrist. Four Bandit soldiers, down in hardly a wink. He shook his head. The Deathbane was powerful. The stink of Forbidden magic crept in the air behind him, getting closer. The sound of the boots warned him – Secrist was running.

"Come on!" Thealos said and bolted. Ticastasy looked bone weary, but he appreciated her determination. Her gown was damp with sweat and it hindered her stride, but she ran with a furious scowl, gripping his hand tightly to keep from stumbling. He would not let her go, no matter if Secrist caught them. He would not leave her to die.

"Shaden!" Secrist hollered. The voice was disembodied in the tunnels. He didn't sound tired at all. "Shaden!"

Thealos' knees groaned liked a rusted door. The constant pounding sent sharp stabs up his ankles, and his feet, swollen and tight, threatened to crack into pieces. He had to keep moving. Keep running.

"Quickfellow," Ticastasy panted. "I'm…I'm so…tired."

"It's okay," he said, squeezing her hand. "A little further." He wiped the stinging sweat from his eyes and tried to focus on the passageway ahead. They had crossed a good deal of the city already. Broken aisles and corridors split off here and there, but he didn't dare take any, knowing that it might lead to a collapsed tunnel that would trap them. Somehow the Kiran Thall still followed them, getting closer and closer the longer they delayed. It was more than hate and anger that drove him. No, it had to be something more. The look in his eyes – the madness. The reek of Forbidden magic.

The Sorian.

He shook his head, too tired to curse. If he could only get to the Crystal. He knew that the magic would be able to stop them all. But he was so tired of running!

"Shaden!" The voice sounded much closer.

"Keep running. Come on, keep running!" Thealos' arm jerked as Ticastasy stumbled and fell, nearly bringing him down with her. She winced as her knees struck the ground. Chewing on her lip, she brought herself back up and looked into his eyes.

"A little further," he lied. "Please!"

She nodded, her shoulders sagging. She couldn't speak.

They started running again, though it was hardly more than a jog. His legs felt like mush and the stitch in his ribs was stabbing deeper with every breath. They had to keep running. He needed time to get the Crystal and use it on Secrist. He could not leave her alone with him. Passing another sideshaft, they hurried to distance themselves from the Kiran Thall.

"Thealos!" a gruff voice hissed from the dark tunnel they had just passed.

Thealos stopped, whirling around. Ticastasy's eyes were wide. "Flent!" she said, her eyes widening in recognition.

Thealos's mouth opened with wonder when he saw Flent and Allavin emerge from the darkness into the torch-lit main hall.

"Thank Vannier!" Thealos gasped.

Allavin smiled with relief. "It's about bloody time we found you."

Ticastasy hugged Flent fiercely, nearly weeping on his shoulder with relief and panic. "We've got to run, we've got to run!"

He pulled her away, studying her face. "What's wrong, girl?" he demanded.

"Shaden!"

Allavin spun around, an arrow nocked in his yew bow.

Secrist slowed, his eyes full of fury. Blood spattered across his cheek. Thealos gulped and stepped back, watching the Kiran Thall advance. The dagger was poised in his right hand, its mottled tip dark with blood.

Allavin didn't hesitate. He let the arrow fly. The bowstring twanged and the shaft struck the Kiran Thall full in the chest. It jerked him back but didn't stop him. Secrist shrugged off the blow and kept coming, not bothering to remove it. The woodsman loosed two more on him. He was too close to miss. But the Kiran Thall's eyes leered in the torch light. He was looking at Thealos, not at any of the rest of them.

"I'll kill you," he said in a half-gargled breath. Spit dribbled down his chin. Wrenching the first arrow out of his chest, he flung it to the ground. The wound closed up on itself, perfect and whole.

Allavin drew another shaft, bringing it back to his ear.

"No," Thealos said, clamping his hand on Allavin's shoulder. "You can't kill him."

"We'll see about that," Flent snorted, swinging loose his Sheven-Ingen axe. "Get going," he snapped over his shoulder.

"No, Flent!" Ticastasy warned. "He killed Sturnin! No, we have to run!"

"Not very good at that," the Drugaen spat. He approached the Kiran Thall, the axe haft tight in his meaty fist. "Come on, whoreson. You still owe me a dance after what you did in Sol."

"Flent!" Ticastasy screamed.

Thealos felt his heart groan. Not the Drugaen too. Not them all.

–*Son of Quicksilver*–

The whisper of the magic came from the ground, swelling around him like mist. He opened his eyes, feeling the magic's need grow inside him. It was there. Behind an Otsquare. He jerked straight, remembering again what Jaerod had said. Where no human could follow.

"Come on," Thealos said, grabbing her by the arm. "Come on. Before he gets us all! Allavin, do you know the way out of here? I have no weapons, I can't protect us."

Allavin nodded, his face twisting with anguish. He watched the Drugaen face off with Secrist.

"Come on, you bloody rake!" Flent roared, bringing the axe up with both hands. He swung wide at Secrist, but the Kiran Thall ducked the blow and stabbed up at his ribs. Ticastasy shrieked and nearly tore away from Thealos, but he yanked her back. Flent dodged the blow and punched the man full in the face. The axe whirled around, up and over, slicing straight down Secrist's front. The gash dropped the Kiran Thall to the ground. But the magic of the Everoot revived him and he came right back up.

"Ban it! Let's go, lass," Allavin said, taking her other arm. "He's made his choice. Best to honor him for it. We're not far from the end of the crossroads," he told Thealos.

Thealos nodded and hurried down the length of the tunnel. He could feel the magic beckoning him. He didn't know how far they had gone, but the Silvan magic whispers grew louder.

–*I will protect you*–

A half-dozen torches appeared in the corridor ahead, carried by Bandit soldiers.

Allavin called out in warning, bringing up his bow. The arrows loped from it swiftly, dropping two before they even knew who was there. Thealos heard her sobbing with grief, and he felt tears swim in his eyes. *Not Flent. Please, Keasorn, don't let him die!*

The Bandits attacked, bringing out their swords as they rushed the hall. Allavin had just enough time to toss Thealos his own sword before the soldiers were there. Allavin swung his yew bow around, stabbing the tip into a soldier's throat. Thealos unsheathed the Silvan-made blade and crossed swords with the next man. The blades rattled, but Thealos slipped around the man, kicking his boot up from under him. Thealos finished him with a stab before the next man was there in his place. Thealos felt his arms go numb with the shock of trading blows. He ducked, feeling his opponent's blade whip past his ear and crash into the wall next to him. He drove his blade into the soldier's gut and shoved him back.

Allavin had a knife in his left hand and finished slitting the throat of the last man. Thealos looked at him and nodded, wiping the sweat from his eyes.

Ticastasy had a knife in her hand now and stared back down the hallway. "Flent," she mumbled. "No!"

Thealos spun around and saw Secrist. As soon as the Kiran Thall set eyes on Thealos, he let out a hiss and started running at them.

"Run!" Thealos shouted. The Kiran Thall was close enough that they could hear his ragged breathing. "Keasorn help us. Run!"

They bolted, abandoning the dead Bandit soldiers.

"*Shenalle protect us from the Firekin,*" Thealos prayed, scrambling down the corridor. "*Shenalle protect us and keep us. Shenalle bring peace to the troubled. Keasorn guide my sword. Keasorn give me courage to strike my enemy…*" Poor Flent!

"He hasn't caught us yet!" Allavin Devers snarled in anger, grabbing Thealos' arm and pulled him towards the crossroads ahead.

–Son of Quicksilver, I have waited for you–

At the end of the tunnel was a junction leading two ways. They stopped, gasping for breath. One path led down to the foot of the hill beneath Landmoor. It opened up to the moors and the streams and darkness where it was still night beyond. The darkness would aid an escape.

The other path led to the Otsquare and the Silverkin Crystal.

Thealos looked back and watched Secrist appear out of the gloom, not thirty paces away. The Silvan magic of the Crystal was so strong that he felt it tremble beneath the stones. He looked down the corridor towards it, seeing blue light shining from a distant set of pillars. The Otsquare. He licked his lips, nearly able to taste the magic.

"Take her to Castun," Thealos whispered, squeezing Allavin's shoulder and giving his sword back to him. "I'll join you there."

"Where are you…?" Allavin demanded as Thealos pushed Ticastasy into his arms. She turned around, her face stricken.

"I'll join you there!" he promised.

"Wait, lad!"

"I'll be safe here," Thealos said, staring into Allavin's eyes. "He won't be able to follow me. Take her and go!" He risked a look at Ticastasy. "I'll come for you," he promised.

"Shaden!" Secrist's voice rasped and he ran at him again. Thealos retreated into the corridor with the Otsquare and watched as Allavin and Ticastasy fled the other way. His heart burned. So many dead. But so many others would die if he didn't get to the Crystal. He felt the light of the magic caress his neck and shivered from the thrill of it.

–Come–

Secrist turned down the hallway after him. A sick grin came over his mouth when he saw Thealos alone. His boots plodded forward, almost like a hoppit doll. Thealos moved slowly, bringing the Kiran Thall after him – deeper into the tunnel's throat. The stench of Forbidden magic was mild compared to the rush of Silvan magic caged behind him. Glancing at the walls, he saw where the chunks of stone had been broken away after Justin had turned the earth magic loose on the aged Sorian. He did not feel the warding anymore. No, the Sorian had set one trap to warn him of intruders. And they had sprung it earlier that morning.

"I'll drink your blood," Secrist vowed, jabbing the air with his knife. "I'll lick it from the rocks." He was squinting, as if he couldn't see Thealos anymore.

Thealos moved backwards, foot over foot, crossing the distance to the portal. He could see Secrist stagger now, his arm coming up to shield his face from the light. It was bright, as bright as the sun. Thealos felt the hair on the back of his neck rise as the magic whispered again.

–I am the Silverkin Crystal–

The words came with a shriek of light that nearly blinded Thealos. Spinning around, he squinted at the stone archway suspended by two pillars sculpted like gryphons. The searing light came from within the archway, brighter than the sun at noonday. He didn't know how he could see anything at all, but there it was. Still squinting, Thealos approached the pillars. The light drowned out details, blurring the pathway to follow. He heard Secrist screaming in pain, but he no longer smelled the Forbidden magic. The Crystal soothed him with its voice, comforting. Thealos touched

the stone portal. He ran his hand along the cool chiseled stone.

Without a look back, Thealos entered the archway.

XXXIV

A stone doorway, beveled and hewn by expert craftsmen, opened at the end of the portal. The Otsquare was behind Thealos now, its blue light nothing but a mirror-like face. Wrapped in comforting folds of magic, he entered the chamber. The stillness was perfect, soothing and calm. The magic greeted him as its son. There were no torch racks on the walls, only small inlets with blue stones that gave off a tranquil glow. Not even a mote of dust swirled in the air. The chamber felt…clean. Thealos was aware of his boots and soiled clothes and every crumb of mud. The sweat cooled on his forehead and back and he found himself shivering.

It only took a moment to look over the chamber, for it was small. It was octagonal in shape and one stone inlet of light glowed from each facet of the wall. The domed ceiling was too a little too tall to reach, and the entire chamber seemed carved out of some fine-grained gray rock he did not recognize. Its texture and feel was similar to the granite temple of Keasorn in Avisahn, except the stone was smoother, more like marble. Behind him, the gryphon arches led back to the tunnels. The wall opposite the arches also had an opening, and he saw a thin stairwell leading down and away. That surprised him – he hadn't been expecting another way out.

Thealos stared at the center of the chamber and folded his arms. There were no shadows in the room. Not one. The room was level all around, but it dipped bowl-like in the center, a very gentle grade. He noticed a pattern on the floor. From opposite walls, the pattern took shape. Thealos cocked his head to examine it. Two thin slats of stone met in the center of the chamber. He nodded, recognizing it. An octagon with a cross-mark inside. It was the symbol on Jaerod's amulet and sword-pommel.

–Claim me–

The voice whispered to him from the center of the rotunda. At the junction of the cross in the center of the room was a thinly carved symbol – two offset squares. It was larger than his hand and nearly indistinguishable. Thealos walked towards it. But as he stepped into the gently sloping bowl, a stream of light came from the ceiling, startling him. The pillar of white fire joined the center of the dome to the Otsquare etched in the floor.

"Son of Quicksilver, welcome"

It was a different voice, Silvan in tongue and style. A man's voice, gentle yet firm. He hesitated, listening to it.

"We created the Crystal to challenge the danger of Firekin. We are the Mages of Safehome and thus have we always done."

Thealos swallowed, feeling gooseflesh prickle down his arms. The voice sounded...almost

familiar. He hesitated, listening as it continued.

"The Crystal was forged and laid within a bed of Hothstone so that none could disturb it. Until now. You are here because you have never touched or tasted that which is Forbidden us. Before you can claim the magic, you must receive a Foretelling. Look into the light and see what was, what is, and what may be. Have courage, Son of Quicksilver. The future has yet to be tamed."

Thealos shivered. The words sent chills through his body. The Mages of Safehome. Who were they? He remembered Jaerod and Justin speaking about them. Both seemed to know what they were. But he knew nothing of their order or what they represented, except a constant struggle against the Sorian. Wishing he had asked more questions, Thealos stared at the chamber walls. One way in. Another way out. The Silverkin Crystal in the crossroads. His heart calmed but his legs felt weak. He had come too far to quit now.

Walking down the thin slope of the bowl, he approached the shaft of light going ceiling to floor. Streamers of light rose and fell. He reached out and touched it, bathing his hand in the brilliance. It was like touching a cloud. The smell of the room was peaceful and inviting. He felt safe, for the first time since he had left Avisahn. He was among his people. Protected and sheltered.

Taking a deep breath, he stood before the pillar of light. Leaning forward, he looked into it.

* * *

The rush and shock of magic was so strong Thealos gasped. It was like dunking his head into an iced over pond. He couldn't move or twitch. His eyes burned, but he couldn't blink to water them. He stood frozen, helpless, and felt a surge of panic rise up in his throat. The glowing pillar held him fast, swirling with color and light. He could not see the rest of the chamber, only the blinding light. He felt eddies of Silvan magic swirl up in the rotunda around him, bulging and burgeoning until it filled the rock with fury. It was like a thousand Wolfsmen blades singing in his veins at once. He felt something inside him rip loose. Drowning in the magic, he struggled to keep sense of who he was and what he was.

Then he saw it.

A whisper of stillness cracked over the room, taming the surging tide of Silvan magic. He could see again, but he was no longer in the chamber. He was in a foamy-blue sky, soaring like a hawk. The magic buoyed him, easing him gently in its arms. He descended over a lush and beautiful valley, teeming with bishop pine and cedar. Groves of green maple with acres of orchards and grasslands in between stretched for miles and miles. His heart melted at the sight, at the vastness and immensity of it. Then he recognized what he was seeing. The Trident River! There were the granite cliffs of the Ravenstone! Looking to the side, he saw the sprawling city of Avisahn nestled against a bend in the river, parapets and towers lost in a dizzying sprawl of manors, parks, terraced walks, and fountains. It was not the Avisahn that he knew. The forest was too thick and vast, stretching from the Ravenstone to the Kingshadow. It was the land before the humans came. Before Sol-don-Orai was destroyed. The pang of longing filled him with such power that he started to weep. But the magic carried him away, following the twists and bends of the river until it flung him out over a huge bastion at the river's end, spilling roughly into the ocean. It was Sol, but glittering! Thealos saw a Silvan fleet, dozens of ships hugging the coast all the way to Jan Lee. There were hundreds of them!

He wanted to stop and take it all in, but the magic carried him on its wings, making him soar over the foam and waves, reaching across the broad expanse of it. There were ships heading south, braving the tides and crosswinds. Looking ahead, he saw the continent rushing towards him.

A tangle of jungle and mountains with snow-capped peaks met him first. The distant coast of the Shoreland. Thealos had never been there, for the Shae did not control that far south. Over the windy peaks he traveled, slipping through gorges that shouldered higher than the Kingshadow mountains. When he reached the top, he swore with amazement.

Hunkered down beyond the mountains was a valley so vast it could have swallowed Dos-Aralon and Avisahn together. Emerald fields flanked by towering redwood and alder stretched out for miles filled with pastures feeding thousands of ox, horse, and sheep. Mines rich with veins of iron, gold, and silver exploded with wealth and promise. He could not see the end of the valley, so distant and vast. There had to be a million humans living there in the homelands and farmlands stretching along the nape of the mountains all the way to the sea. It was a vast and rich country. Cities dotted the land, hundreds of them. Towers yearning to touch the sky wrestled with domed assemblies, all glimmering with gold paving. The magic eased him down slowly, gently, through a pink rainsquall at sunset – closer to the earth, closer to the rich dark soil that drank in the rain from the skies. And there, feeding the land with its magic, Thealos saw the Everoot. Flecks of blue and violet danced in fields acres wide. The earth magic sang with glory.

Darkness fell across his vision and when the sun rose, the smell of smoke and char stung his nose. The magic hoisted him again, zooming across the sky. He twisted around, seeing the veil of smoke and haze lingering over the dark valley. Homesteads were ruined and abandoned. Fires burned constantly from shattered palaces and desolate parks. He saw two armies marching in the valley, marching from destruction to destruction. Their minions spread death and havoc. Thealos saw the struggle, looping low so that he could see their faces. Faces full of hate and fury with drops of juice trickling down their chins. It was Everoot again. The two armies clashed fiercely, leaving fields of blood and the dead. But the dead rose and continued to fight, death begetting life over and over. Endlessly. The hot fires burned and ravaged the earth, but men would not die. They fought over the Everoot, to dig out the last remnants of it. To control it all.

Thealos watched with disgust as the scene changed, growing darker and darker. He did not understand the magic of the vision and how it worked, but he did understand the mood of the land and was not just seeing the inhabitants with his eyes. The earth magic whispered its secrets to him. The dead were in piles now, in furrows that stretched like grain rows. He watched arrows hailing down from the skies, dropping men to agonizing ends as the Deathbane-coated tips robbed their lives. The armies were more cautious now, the warriors dwindling fewer and fewer in number. The entire land was desolate, save a few cloistered cities that barred either side from entering. Thealos watched in horror as the armies struck again, hammering at each other viciously, dwindling fewer and fewer.

Then the wind started to blow.

Thealos felt the eddies of magic shift with the jerking motion of the winds. It was blowing eastwards, towards the sea. He watched in moments as the fields turned brown, and the earth became pockmarked and cracked. The armies continued to fight for control of the Everoot, but then men were dying of thirst. There was no water, nothing to feed the plant, to keep it alive and whole. He listened to the screams of the dying and shuddered in his soul from the total destruction. It was collapsing, crumbling like a castle made of blasted sand. The magic pulled him away, dragging him from the terrible scene. He wanted to weep again at the destruction of so many. Dust blew over the land, clouds of thick black dust and ash. It choked the life out of everything.

Thealos turned over and saw the sea, zipping across the eddies of water that separated them. He was ashore immediately. Groves of trees stretched all the way to the sea, but he saw the moors and a lone hill. In the moors, he saw a citadel, a watchpost that huddled in the midst of the

trees. It was Silvan with the banners of House Silverborne flapping on the poles. It was a different crest, though similar to the one he remembered. The rising sun of Silverborne was garnished with green oak leaves and settled on a field of black – the color of war. Cradled in the arms of the magic, Thealos could see the details clearly, burning in his mind. He swooped low before he saw the Mages.

There were three, tall Silvan men with green cloaks and tassels. Each one was flanked by a Sleepwalker bearing a medallion on their chest and a long sword at their hip. Thealos watched intently. The Mages were speaking to a remnant of Shae around the watchpost. He watched the Mages raise their hands and one tilted his head back, singing. The earth opened beneath them, unfolding like a rose. There was a light in the sky, stabbing down like the sun and then a shadow smothered them. Looking up, Thealos saw a city emerge from the clouds, wider than the watchpost, nearly as wide as Avisahn itself. It descended from the heavens and hovered there, an obelisk in the sky. Thealos waited, watching in amazement. The city was enormous, more beautiful than anything he had ever seen. He had heard of the city of Safehome. He was certain Keasorn himself belonged there.

A rotunda gradually descended from the floating city, carved out of living rock. It went into the open earth where the Mages waited. The low rumble of thunder sounded and the huge city was gone. It was happening so quickly, Thealos longed to learn more. Who were the Mages? Why did only one of them sing? Where did the Sleepwalkers come from? Why were they speaking to the Shae near the watchpost and not in it? The magic pulled him again, drifting across the forest a short way. In the darkest, thickest portion of the forest, he watched another set of Mages at a pond planting clumps of Everoot at the base of a beautiful, secluded waterfall. Justin was there, his arms folded imperiously. One of the Mages touched the Warder Shae's forehead and there was a flash of light.

Darkness washed over Thealos. He was back in the rotunda, his legs wobbling. Then the magic swept him up again, easing him back into the sky. He looked down across and saw that the forest had receded to a tangle of crooked cedar and vine maple. He watched as scores and scores of Bandit soldiers scraped the last of the Everoot from the trees and boulders, tossing the clumps into barrows and baskets. They were destroying the peaceful glen, turning the pond and forest into a filthy network of sluices and gutters. This was not the past. It was happening at that moment. Thealos could hear their grunts, he could see the flexing muscles of their shoulders as they worked. The Sorian who had faced Jaerod stood nearby, her dark eyes smiling. She wanted the Everoot used, she wanted the Deathbane to murder. To cause havoc in the valley. To destroy what she could not control. Yes, she wanted to see Ballinaire destroyed too, waiting quietly to place another in his stead. Slowly, Thealos felt himself drawn away from the glen, away from the harvesting. He wanted to know more. He had to learn more!

The magic took him to the road that sliced through the forest where the Bandit army waited just beyond the screen of trees. In the morning, it would come into the city as the fog shielded it from the eyes of the bastion walkers. The doors would be opened to let them in, and the war with Dos-Aralon would begin. There would be no siege. It would fall in a day, just as Jaerod had said. Again the magic was pulling him back, drawing him across the moors to the fortress. He fought against it, tried to stop himself, but the magic tethered him. There was so much to learn! The intents and thoughts of the Bandits were made plain to him. He saw everything, if but for a moment. He turned and saw Landmoor rising up from the mist. He watched Allavin Devers and Ticastasy scramble out of the mouth of the ruined shrine, followed by Bandits and Kiran Thall. They were worried about him. Allavin was praying Thealos would make it through, but the woodsman felt his duty to protect Ticastasy. She was worrying even more and grieving for Flent. Her heart was breaking. Tears

stung his eyes and he yearned to reach out to her, to let her know he was safe and to comfort her because of Flent's death. But the magic would not let him. It whisked Thealos down the halls, past a screaming Secrist who thrashed against the blue light, trying to shove himself through the Otsquare. The man's thoughts were all madness, placed there by the Sorian woman. With one intent – to kill Thealos. The blue light snared Thealos, bringing him back inside with a violent jerk.

Darkness.

The vision opened a third time and Thealos saw himself kneeling in a pool of light in the middle of the rotunda. He watched his actions, saw the look of determination on his own face. Reaching into the Otsquare embedded in the floor, he withdrew a silver amulet and chain with a blue sapphire. The jewel was the size of an egg, garnished with Silvan runes. In his mind, he watched as the blue lights in the rotunda winked out, leaving only himself and the glowing Silverkin Crystal. He was alone, but only for a moment. Secrist came into the rotunda, his eyes mad and hateful. Thealos watched himself scramble backwards before the magic surged to life on its own, flaring brilliantly in the darkness. It ripped the motes of Deathbane from the dagger and wrapped the Kiran Thall in folds of blue fire. The fire spread throughout the tunnels, stealing Forbidden magic from every nook and corner. The fire burned fast and quick, slamming into the aged Sorian with its full intensity, dropping the man to his knees. Ballinaire staggered and choked, appearing to age years in moments. Every shard of darkness and filth was licked up by the flames before rushing back. Thealos could see it all.

The fire rushed back, gathering like a storm and capturing the magic within the blue sapphire. No, there was something else too. Thealos watched the Forbidden magic course through his body and into the Crystal. Yes, the Firekin was swallowed by the Crystal's power, but it passed through him first! The black evil went through his body like water, sickening him. And he watched as he collapsed in a heap on the floor, helpless as the Crystal winked out. He understood. He finally understood! The magic of the Crystal required a terrible price. Thealos winced as the Kiran Thall lunged forward and kicked him in the ribs. He flinched as he watched Secrist pummel him again, ripping the Silvan magic from his hand. He understood it too clearly. The Crystal searched and trapped Forbidden magic. But whoever wielded it could feel the Firekin as it was captured. The artifact did not stop men of flesh and blood. It would not stop the Bandit Army. Secrist held the magic triumphantly in his hand, staring at its weight and power. The madness was gone. Looking down at the crumpled Shae, Secrist dropped low and slit his throat.

The vision started to fade, snapping him back to the present. In the distance, he heard the Sorian woman's voice welcome Secrist back and demand he give the Crystal to her.

And Thealos knew that he would.

* * *

No!

Thealos blinked awake. He lay on his back on the floor of the rotunda, soaked with sweat. The light in the center of the octagonal room was gone, but the blue stones from the eight walls shone, leaving no shadows on the floor. Thealos' hand was near the Otsquare etched at the bottom. Waiting for him.

—Son of Quicksilver—

The magic beckoned to him, insistent, like Shae barters whispering through the rock to wake him to his needs and offer their wares. It felt the presence of Forbidden magic near, it hungered to lash out at it with its power. Thealos recoiled, scrambling to get away from the center of the cham-

ber.

—Claim me—

Thealos panted heavily. The images of the light were so vivid, he felt he had lived them. He saw himself dead on the floor, over and over again. It wasn't the fear of dying that filled his stomach with snakes. If he knew that both Sorian would be harmed by the Crystal, that the war would not continue – he would gladly give his life. He had seen what happened in Sol-don-Orai. He couldn't let that happen to his people. His mind felt like it would burst like a melon. But he also knew that the Everoot still being harvested out in the moors would not be banished by the Crystal. The Bandits would still be able to turn it into Deathbane. And there would be nothing left to stop them if the Crystal belonged to the Sorian.

—I have waited for you. You are the rightful heir. Claim me!—

Over and over, Thealos saw it in his mind. The Sorian would get the Crystal. The war would start across the land and no one in Avisahn would know what had happened. The futility of it all sickened him. It could not be happening like this. He clenched his fists and swore. No! He was too close to back away now. If he could take the Crystal and run away, if he could...

But would that really change what would happen? The warding failed as soon as the Crystal was taken. The Otsquare in the hall would no longer shelter him. And when Secrist attacked, the Crystal would surge to life of its own will. Thealos doubted that he would be able to control it. It was all so clear to him. So brutally clear. He knew now why Jaerod had sought him out. The Sleepwalker had known that Thealos could get the Crystal but would not be able to protect it. Thealos bowed his head in despair. There was no one left to protect him. Not Sturnin, not Flent. Not even Allavin Devers.

"Jaerod!"

Thealos clenched his hands, staring at the symbol on the floor. The Crystal whispered to him and demanded he take it. His mind raced furiously. What if he waited? Surely Secrist would not stay out there forever? Surely someone would come? But how would he know when that happened? He was still hungry and had no provisions or supplies at all. How long could he afford to wait before seizing it? Then he remembered. In the morning, the Bandit army would seize Landmoor.

It would be almost impossible to get out with it then.

He knew in his heart what he needed to do. If he could get out of Landmoor that night, the fog would hide his trail and give him a chance to slip away. Back to Avisahn. Back home. The Shae had no idea what they were up against. And if they hesitated in this war, if they stood apart as they had for so many years, it would be too late. Dry sobs threatened to shake loose inside him, but he felt that he had no tears left after all he had seen in the Foretelling. Someone had to warn the Shae. He had nothing to offer as proof to Laisha or the Sunedrion. No evidence at all. Not even a tiny stub of Everoot. He stared back down at the small Otsquare etched on the floor. His fingers twitched, but he clenched his hand into a fist. If he took the Crystal he would probably die. If he died, the Sorian would claim it. But if he went back to Avisahn, they would try him as a traitor. What were his choices then really?

A thought struck him. What if he made the Shae come to the Shoreland to get him?

Looking up, Thealos stared at the other doorway and the thin stairwell leading out of the chamber. Had the Mages of Safehome known all those centuries ago that he would need another way out of there?

Think it through, he told himself. The Foretelling had given him the information he needed to survive. He knew the past. He knew the present. He knew what would happen if he tried to claim the Crystal now. Despite the threat of Secrist, the presence of a Sorian within the tunnels was prob-

ably enough to provoke the Crystal's magic. He had no idea how long the consequence of the magic would sicken him. All that Foridden magic, churning inside of him, before being captured within the stone. He could be sick and weak for days…for even longer. No – he had to abandon the tunnels. The Crystal was still safe. The Bandits would not be able to take it if he left it there. He would need protectors. He would need an entire company of Crimson Wolfsmen. Chewing on his lip, he thought about the alternatives.

There was really only one choice to be made. If he had felt the prick of awareness on the back of his neck – the assurance that a Sleepwalker was nearby to defend him, he would never have hesitated claiming the magic. But that wasn't an option to him. There were no Sleepwalkers waiting for him. And without food, water, or weapons, it would be difficult enough making it back across the Shadows Wood. If he delayed much longer, by morning it would be impossible to get out.

Stifling the urgent whispers of the Crystal, Thealos left the rotunda and descended the narrow stairs.

XXXV

The Shoreland fog cloaked the moors in thick gray folds. It would take the sun hours to work through it and restore some warmth to Thealos' body. He couldn't remember when he had been so cold or so hungry. Or so discouraged. The wild berries and mushrooms he'd eaten left an empty feeling inside and juice stains on his fingers. He worked his way east of Landmoor along the jagged edge of the Shadows Wood. Until he was certain he was past the bulk of Tsyrke's army, he didn't dare try crossing the forest. One thought burned in his mind. Meet up with Allavin and Ticastasy in Castun. It kept his boots shuffling one after the other. He'd abandoned stepwalking hours earlier to cover more ground. His eyes drooped as he walked. To Castun. *Just a little further,* he told himself.

The small trading post was a good hike from the south fringe of the forest. He hoped to be there in two days if he could manage it, but he needed sleep. Every jackdaw jumping on the branches or fluttering by made his head jerk. Wiping his mouth, he plodded ahead. He knew enough about the forest to keep himself alive. But his hunger wasn't getting any smaller. Without a hunting bow and dagger, he wouldn't be able to do any real cooking. Castun – just a little further. A fresh hot stew served in a trencher bowl teased his imagination. Some cool Silvan wine for his thirst.

The Shadows Wood stretched for miles ahead of him, sparking visions of the vast forest he had seen in the Foretelling. The memory was still sharp in his mind. Had the magic really shown him the past? His heart ached at the thought. So many had died in Sol-don-Orai. Suddenly, he remembered the look on Sturnin's face as the dagger plunged into him. The Deathbane had ripped the life from him. He bit his lip, wincing. The knight had saved his life. If he hadn't wrestled Secrist down, the Kiran Thall might have killed him too.

Thealos folded his arms tightly to stop shuddering. He had to stop thinking about it, for that way led to madness. He made a silent vow – the knights of Owen Draw would learn about Sturnin's courage. Thealos would see to that. His legs throbbed and he stumbled over some exposed roots and went down in a patch of witch-thorn. The witch-thorn cut up his hands and stung. Rising up, he looked around, amazed to find himself in the thick of the forest. He couldn't remember how long he had been walking and didn't remember when he had decided to enter the woods. Rubbing his eyes and sucking on the bleeding pricks to soothe his hands, he sat down on the log of a felled tree and looked for the sun. His stomach gave off a dull ache, reminding him again of his hunger.

"Think, Thealos," he muttered to himself. He rubbed his forehead. The road leading to Castun would be to the west. So would the Bandit army if he wasn't careful. He dropped down from the twisted trunk and started off again, heading north he thought. His mind swam with fatigue, blurring the trees and juniper shrubs ahead of him. He was so tired! He had dozed in the

dungeon beneath Landmoor. But the truth of it was that he hadn't slept well since Avisahn.

Clumsily, Thealos staggered on. He tried stepwalking again, but that only slowed him down. His thoughts danced like fireflies. To blot out the pain in his hands and legs he composed a letter in his mind to send to Avisahn. What could he write that would have the Shae army rushing in? *To the Council Elder of Vannier—greetings. During my travels, I've missed the turnish pastries from the baking guilds the most and wondered if you could spare a plate of them. The Silvan wine in Castun is decent, I'm pleased to report. Haven't tried the Spider Ale yet – sorry to disappoint you. I could use a bag of Aralonian pieces and wondered if you could ask my Correl for me. You are so very good at extortion, I'm sure he'll listen to you. And if you could tell the Princess of Avisahn that I'm forming a rebellion against her Sovereignty down here in the Shoreland, that would also be much appreciated. I've found a nice abandoned Shae watchpost to get things started –and the view of the moors is quite exceptional. With fondest regards, Thealos Quickfellow.*

Thealos rubbed his bleary eyes and chuckled to himself. He would send a separate message to Laisha as well – phrased differently of course. He could pay a runner to get them to Dos-Aralon and maybe to one of the merchants Correl worked with. He didn't dare go back himself. If Nordain caught him first, he wouldn't be given the chance to defend himself. The trial could drag on for months, and the Shae didn't have months. They could no longer hide behind the Trident river. They could no longer afford to remain behind and watch. The Silverkin Crystal would not destroy the Bandit army in the Shoreland. He knew that much for certain. The Shae army would need to rise itself in war once again. It hadn't happened since the Purge Wars. But it was going to happen again. Oh, he couldn't wait to see the look on Nordain's face when he was forced to admit that Thealos had been right!

Thealos kept walking. He might rouse the Shae army, but he would still need to convince them on the right course of action. And how would he do that without proof? Allavin Devers would help him. He was a Shaefellow and a tracker for Dos-Aralon. Maybe his word would help sway them. There was Ticastasy too. Yes, she'd be safer in Avisahn than remaining down in Castun. He shook his head – what was he thinking? Two humans – he doubted the Sunedrion would even let them speak. But they had both seen the Everoot. That made three witnesses, which were necessary according to the law. Thealos muttered a curse. Two humans and a Kilshae – wonderful! If only he had been able to save a little bit of Everoot. To show them that it was real. And Justin – poor Justin! Thealos felt his heart throb with regret. The Warder Shae was still back in Landmoor locked up in a cell. He didn't even want to *be* in Landmoor – he had insisted on going to Avisahn instead. Thealos wished that he had. He stopped, feeling the sense of failure rise up in him like a hungry wave. Biting his lip, he shook his head and kept walking. He could not quit. He would not quit! He would make the Shae listen. Somehow, he would convince them.

His foot snagged in another twisted root and this time he went down hard. Blackness washed over him along with a queasy feeling. His ankle throbbed. Thealos breathed out slowly, trying to steady himself with the pain. He'd rest for a moment, just until the pain subsided…

He slept.

Thealos awoke with a jolt. He had been dreaming of his Wolfsman blade. The one the Sorian had destroyed. In his mind, he saw the gemstone eyes wink with power, trembling with Silvan magic. The presence was so strong, he thought he could reach out and touch it. The forest was shaded, swallowed by the shadows of dusk. Sweet Vannier, how long had he slept? Coming fully awake, he sensed the presence of the Shae all around him.

As Thealos raised his head, he saw a leaf-bladed short sword pointed at his neck.

At first he didn't believe his eyes, that it was only the remnants of a dream, but two other

Wolfsmen appeared from the thick brush clogging the path in the woods. He recognized the man standing over him, the leader. They had met in Sol.

The Crimson Wolfsman Lor studied him shrewdly. "*So, you're alive after all.*"

He sounded surprised. Thealos' ankle murmured in pain as he tried to bring himself to his knees. He was still dazed. Three Crimson Wolfsmen. His breath started to choke off in panic. *Not now,* he thought. *Sweet Vannier, not yet!* He wasn't ready to return to Avisahn. No, it was too soon. Without any evidence, they would mock his story and imprison him.

Thealos tried to speak, but his throat was thick and his mouth too dry. He shook his head and grunted, trying to work some spit into his mouth.

The Wolfsman crouched on one knee and handed him a flask. Thealos gulped the leather-flavored water down and noticed that the Lor hadn't lowered the short sword yet. He was still on guard, curiously watching the woods around Thealos.

"*You are weary, Kil-quickfellow,*" the Wolfsman said with more than a hint of disdain. "*When did you escape the human army?*"

Thealos stared into the man's blue eyes. "How did you find me?"

The Wolfsman gave him a thin smile. "*It was not that difficult,*" he said mockingly. "*I have another quaere with me. Where is the Sleepwalker you fled with from Sol?*"

Thealos shook his head. Seven Crimson Wolfsmen sent to bring him back to Avisahn? *Hate, I'm in more trouble than I thought!* "What…what was your name?" Thealos stammered.

"*I am Xenon Ironwolf, Watcher Lor of Sol.*" His eyes narrowed – probably because Thealos wasn't using Silvan. "*And you are under arrest by the Shae Council of Elders for high treason. You've led us on a chase over half the valley. Are you tired of running yet, boy?*"

Thealos shoved the flask into his hand. "*I will go with you willingly, Xenon. But I need to go to Castun first. It's a town not far from here and on the way back. If we can stop…*"

The Wolfsman smirked. "*I think not.*"

Thealos ground his teeth, losing his temper in a snap of emotions. "You do not understand what is happening down here, Xenon. You have no comprehension of the danger. It is your duty to protect our people. For the love of Keasorn, listen to me! The humans are using Forbidden magic. They will use it against us. I have evidence of this, but it is in Castun. Please…please take me there on the way. It won't delay us long, maybe a day."

Xenon shook his head. "*It is you who does not understand, Kil-quickfellow. You have been summoned by the Council of Elders. I arrested you in Sol, but you would not come willingly. I'll truss you in ropes if I must. But you will come with us.*"

"Please!" Thealos begged. "At least send one of your men to Castun for me!"

Xenon shook his head and stared at him coldly. "*To be killed by a Sleepwalker like the Kiran Thall were? I'd go myself if I believed you were honorable. You've shamed your family and your people. You are Kilshae now and have lost the use of your true family name. Remember that, Kil-quickfellow.*" He rose and glared down at Thealos. "*Bind him.*"

Thealos winced as the Wolfsmen tied his wrists behind his back. He stared at the Lor and nearly choked and he tried to speak. He used Silvan this time. "*I am Thealos Quickfellow, an heir of Quicksilver. And I have not received anathema yet. I am a Shae.*"

"*You can call yourself the 'king of linseed oil' for all that I care. Until we get back to Avisahn. Until you answer for your crimes before the Shae Council of Elders and the Sunedrion.*" Xenon made hand motions to start off into the woods.

* * *

Ticastasy walked with her arms folded. Allavin's cloak draped over her shoulders, but it wasn't enough to stop the chilling feeling in her heart. She was exhausted and more than once, the observant woodsman had to keep her from walking right into a tree. She had watched the evil dagger steal Sturnin Goff's life. If Flent had fallen in the same manner, she would never forgive Tsyrke. Not ever. Her mind had been made up on that point.

"Watch the roots," Allavin warned, alerting her just in time to slow and watch her step, crunching through the dried fragments of branches and debris. Allavin walked behind her, using the wide broom of a cedar branch to mask their trail as they passed. Twice during the journey they had hidden in swamp gullies as the Kiran Thall roamed the woods looking for them. But Allavin had kept them safe.

"How far do you think it is to Castun?" she mumbled. "We've been walking all day."

"We'll get there soon. I don't know about you, but I could use a soft pillow tonight."

"Mmmm," she replied, barely able to speak. She paused as he approached and shared some water from his flask with her. The water was warm but it soothed her throat. She felt a pang of guilt, knowing that Quickfellow didn't even have a dagger to use or a blanket to roll up in. She looked down at herself. The gown he had given her was mud-spattered and torn. She'd worn it to impress Tsyrke and to lie to him. To stab him in the heart as he had done to her. She wiped her eyes, her thoughts lost in a hazy cloud. What was she going to do? Where could she go? Quickfellow had said he would meet them in Castun. Was he a new path her future was going to take? A barter's son was definitely more realistic than a Silvan prince.

"Come on, lass. Let's keep going."

Ticastasy nodded and started trudging through the woods again. When they came to the edge of the forest, she nearly cried with relief. Castun would be close. As she started walking again, more confidently now, she felt Allavin catch her arm.

"What is it?"

"Smoke," he whispered, pointing.

She squinted and realized it herself. Castun was burning.

Sagging to her knees in the dry prairie grass, she started to cry in thick choking sobs. She felt Allavin's arm slide around her shoulders. She could barely hear him over own ragged tears.

"This happens in war," he said and squeezed. "And it's only going to get worse."

* * *

Ticastasy awoke later hearing voices whispering softly in the musical language of the Shae. She didn't know how long she'd been asleep, but it was night again and she was vaguely aware of falling asleep on Allavin's warm cloak. As she slowly sat up, she wondered with a surge of hope if Quickfellow had caught up with them.

It was Jaerod.

"She's awake," the Sleepwalker said as she hurried to rise. He reached over and pulled some food out of his pack and offered it to her. She took it hungrily.

"Jaerod just finished telling me what happened," Allavin said while she ate. He shook his head and sighed with disbelief.

"Hello, Ticastasy," Jaerod said, his face impassive.

She nodded in welcome and pulled the cloak around her shoulders. She was relieved to see him alive, but where was Quickfellow? "Where have you been?"

Allavin answered for him. "The Sorian tried to kill him, but he used some magic to bring him back to the city he comes from – somewhere in the East Kingdoms? He's been hurrying back to join us, but knew he came too late."

"I thought you were Quickfellow's protector?" she said, wiping the crumbs from her mouth. The bread was wonderful.

"He's safe, at least for now. He was found by the Crimson Wolfsmen earlier today," Jaerod answered. "They're bringing him back to Avisahn right now. I'm going to join him after I leave you both."

She nodded, feeling miserable. "Did he…get what he came here to get?"

Jaerod looked at her seriously and shook his head. There was something in his eyes as he looked at her. She couldn't decide what it was. Compassion? Pity? "The warding is still in place. One of the Sorian has left something there in case the warding fails. From what Allavin has told me, I'm not sure Thealos was able to get the magic safely. If he took it, the warding would have vanished."

Ticastasy sighed wearily. "Then we failed, didn't we?"

Jaerod smiled and put his hand on her shoulder. "We only fail if we stop trying. I don't think Thealos is going to quit…do you?"

She thought about it a moment, feeling a fluttering of hope in her heart. "He's pretty stubborn, isn't he?"

"He's very stubborn. When he comes back to the Shoreland, he'll bring a Silvan army with him. He'll need you both as he's needed you before. Be watching for him. Be waiting."

"We will," Allavin promised – and she knew he meant it for both of them.

* * *

Tsyrke reached down and picked the snapped necklace from the dirty straw. The sparrow pendant shimmered in the torchlight coming from the hall outside the cell. He closed the necklace into his fist, squeezing tightly.

"What happened?" he asked huskily, staring at the lump of char sprawled near the cell wall. If she was dead, he would never forgive himself.

Mage stepped near the stain sprawled against the far wall. "Have your men wrap this in wet blankets and bury it under stones."

"Who was it?" Tsyrke asked. "The knight?"

"I can only guess. There is no spark of life magic left here to read. The victims of Deathbane are nameless. It could as easily have been the Shae."

Tsyrke squeezed the pendant, feeling the metal bite into his palm. She had cast the pendant away. It was his only link to her, allowing him to find her no matter where she was. It had surprised and worried him that she had stayed so long in the cell. When his soldiers pounded on the door, warning that the dungeons had been breached and that men were dying swiftly to some unknown plague, he had feared the worst. He still feared it. Fury boiled and raged inside him. There were too many players, too many risks. The walls of his life were tottering, ready to collapse. By the druids, if he went down, he would bring as many as he could down in ashes with him.

He stood slowly, feeling his bones ache and his heart bleed. "Who knows about the Deathbane," he asked Mage with a thick voice, aware that they both already knew the answer to that question. Their eyes met in the stillness of the cell. "I've had enough of her meddling."

* * *

Dujahn of the Gray Legion walked down the tunnel corridor, keeping wary of the Bandits who saw him pass. He doubted any of them would recognize him or even be able to describe him if pressed. The city had fallen so quickly, it was almost a shame. Not even a skirmish. The garrison cells were teeming with prisoners, mostly soldiers who hadn't sworn allegiance to Ballinaire yet. But the palace dungeon held the most dangerous enemies, and they would probably spend the entire war in the cramped cells, hungry for even a whisper of sunlight. These were men not even Ballinaire dared trust.

Passing under a ring of light from a flickering torch, he paused to study the cells. Where was it? Each cell was shielded by a huge iron door with thick rivets and hinges. Miestri had told him what to look for. A rat hissed at him from the rafters as he passed by. Scowling at it, he kept walking.

The orb in his pocket suddenly glowed with warmth, burning against his leg. He reached in and retrieved it. It glowed like firelight, casting hazy shadows on the floor around him. He stopped and looked above the cell door. There was a marking there in the stone – he'd missed it completely walking by.

Reaching to his belt, he unfastened a key ring and searched for the right one. It fit into the lock with a loud click. Twisting it, the lock gave way. He grabbed the handle and pulled the door open.

The hazy light from the orb revealed a Shae huddled in the corner. His eyes glowed in the dark.

"Ah, there you are," Dujahn said, unnerved at the look the Shae gave him. "The Lady of Vale is ready for your report. She sent me to bring you to her pavilion." Dujahn hesitated. The Shae looked at him coldly and spat something in Silvan.

"*That's right, you only speak the tongue of the Shae,*" Dujahn went on in stumbling Silvan. He really wasn't very good at it yet, but it was something to work on. "*Are you ready? The Lady of Vale wishes to speak to you.*"

"*And who is that?*" the Shae asked softly, angrily.

"*She said you would remember her when you remembered your name.*"

The Shae shifted and rose slowly, long thin arms folded imperiously. "*And how does she know my name?*" he demanded.

Dujahn smirked. "*Because she was the one who took it from you. Don't you remember it, Ravin Silversheir?*"

The orb flashed a wicked glow and the Shae sank to his knees, clutching his head in agony. He screamed, full of pain and loathing. Dujahn watched him, mesmerized. But when the onslaught of pain had finally passed, the blue-robed Shae recovered and stared up at him, a submissive look on his face. His eyes were glowing the same color as the orb.

"*I will serve my Lady,*" he whispered, his eyes filling with tears.

THE END

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